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# THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

BY
THE REV. W. C. E. NEWBOLT, M.A.
CANON AND CHANCELLOR OF ST. PAUL'S CATHEDRAL

Posui verba Mea in ore tuo, et in umbrâ manus Meæ protexi te, ut plantes cælos et fundes terram et dicas ad Sion: populus Meus es tu.

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# PREFACE

An attempt has been made in these pages to approach the ministry of preaching on its spiritual side.

Preaching at the present moment seems to be suffering from a contemptuous disparagement in those who hear, and from a misunderstanding on the part of some of those who speak.

The words spoken from the pulpit need to be rescued from the sense that they form an ungrateful task, delivered in obedience to an undertaking made at Ordination, to those who fain would be excused from listening.

Time was when the sermon was an essay, polished and complete, but far removed from the wants and sufferings of daily life. The sermon still has a tendency to be an expression of opinion from those not always qualified to give it, on politics or questions of the day.

God forbid that such subjects should necessarily be excluded from the pulpit, for the world needs help to a right judgment in all things. But in the sermon all subjects should be approached from the side of God, by those who (to use a legal phrase) are retained to represent His interests. And the endeavour is here made to show that words spoken from the pulpit are first and foremost

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a message from God; and that therefore the spiritual storing of the heart and mind is the main and most pressing requisite for the preacher.

Most of the thoughts which the writer has striven to convey in these pages have formed subjects of addresses to clergy in retreats and otherwise. And he can only hope that there does not linger in them any note of self-sufficiency, or of a desire to teach others the things which he needs to learn himself. The words here spoken represent deficiencies which all preachers must have felt at some time or other, and the remedy for which is to be found only in God.

W. C. E. NEWBOLT.

3, AMEN COURT,
*Christmas*, 1912.

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# CHAPTER I

## THE MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL

χαίρετε καὶ χαιρόμεν.
(The Message from Marathon.)

"I preached as never sure to preach again,
And as a dying man to dying men."
BAXTER.

DEAN CHURCH, speaking to clergy, has said, that one of the things which we shall least like to meet at the Day of Judgment will be our own sermons.[1]

We live so much in a spirit of reaction that sermons which once were considered the be all and end all of the religion of an Englishman, are now gently deprecated by the deliverer and avoided by the would-be receiver. The preacher delivers "a few words," and the hearer demands "a short sermon," and one thing which English people at all events used most thoroughly to believe in is taking its place with the Bible and Sunday and other institutions which have been killed by clerical neglect, or even active co-operation with the forces of destruction.

Is it good that either of these three institutions should die out of an Englishman's life?

[1] Dean Church, "Cathedral and University Sermons," p. 216.

Have we not been able to place the altar in its proper place in our churches, and let the pulpit occupy a subservient position, without damaging it altogether as a power?

Are we so concerned in asserting our lawful heritage in the priesthood that we think nothing of that ministry which was wielded with such power by the prophets of old, by the Forerunner, by the Apostles, by our Blessed Lord Himself, the Word of God?

"Ministers of the Gospel"! Cant has killed the title; and yet it rests on Bible authority. "We were allowed (approved) by God to be put in trust with the Gospel." δεδοκιμάσμεθα ὑπὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ πιστευθῆναι τὸ εὐαγγέλιον.[1] Men still fondly try to believe this of us, in spite of our moral essays, or polite reflexions, or borrowed phrases of colourless platitudes, which save us from the deadly error of partisanship, or of appearing to take sides. "Our clergyman," "our minister," if it be only the "our parson," of debated nomenclature, still means something, as do the phrases "our doctor," "our solicitor," "our Member of Parliament." Cannot we supply a connotation to that which has become a very thin denotation? And see whether we cannot revivify even the old dignity of "parson," and much more, the intense dignity and importance which attaches to "a minister of the Gospel"?

Obviously we must establish the right meaning of "Gospel," before we attempt to deal with our ministry of it.

[1] 1 Thess. ii. 4.

A piteous letter has lately appeared in a Church paper signed by one "Deeply perplexed," who wonders what he ought to do as a candidate for Ordination in the face of the conduct of those who consider themselves at liberty and abundantly justified, in day by day proclaiming at the most solemn moments and before God, that they believe in the Virgin birth of our Blessed Lord, His glorious Resurrection and Ascension, when all the time they believe nothing of the kind, attaching a meaning to words which tend to rob all plain statements of their value and importance. Well may he be deeply perplexed. Most certainly we cannot claim to be ministers of the Gospel, our words will have a hollow ring, a moral deadness will set in, unless we believe in a message from heaven, of which we are the recipients. Has God spoken, or has He not? Not in the general tones of natural religion which no one disputes, but in the special tones of a revealed message, which the Church has received to hold, as a deposit of faith.

Is the Gospel to us a message? A divine message? A message of importance to which we must listen? A message of absolute truth? A message which no Prometheus with a critical apparatus could snatch from heaven?—in one word, a revelation? Such a message as this the Gospel asserts itself to be.

"Behold I bring you good tidings of great joy,"[1] says the angel from heaven to the shepherd. "I declare unto you the Gospel,"[2] says the Christian

[1] St. Luke ii. 10. [2] 1 Cor. xv. 1.

preacher, to his Corinthian converts. It is to this great preacher St. Paul "the word of truth, the Gospel of your salvation."[1] It is not a graceful contribution to the parliament of religions, but a dread and solemn truth which has imposed upon him its constraining obligation. "For though I preach the Gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the Gospel!"[2] The characteristic of our message, which we share with St. Paul and the great teachers, is that it is good news, not good advice, or good teaching, or the opinion of learned men, but good news from God.

It is a fact which cannot be denied that there is to all appearance a great need of good news in the world.

"Watch the faces which hurry past in succession in the crowded streets," says Dean Church, "made in the same type, varying infinitely one from another: face after face disappoints, if it does not repel and shock: face after face tells with dreary uniformity how far, even outwardly, men are short of their ideals."

St. Paul listened and looked, and he saw creation itself in an attitude of strained expectancy, with upturned head waiting for the fulfilment of a deeply implanted hope. He heard the inarticulate groan with which it prayed for deliverance from the brand of failure (*ματαιότης*) which is stamped so deep into the world of the Fall.[3] The preacher[4]

[1] Ephes. i. 13. [2] 1 Cor. ix. 16.
[3] Rom. viii. 19–23. [4] Dr. H. Scott-Holland.

has described to us the disappointment which awaits us as we look out on the world and its beauty, and the true way of reading the lesson of that disappointment.

How beautiful it all looks as we gaze out on the wide-spreading landscape, the fields in their verdure, the lanes running down the hillside with the fresh beauty of their green life, the sheep on the downs, the village clustered round its church, a very image of still and peaceful life! And yet when we go down into it, what do we find? The red beak, the tearing claw, blight, decay, arrested life, sorrows and failures, tragedies of almost unrelieved sadness. And yet if we look at it aright, here, too, is a Gospel, redemption out of loss, achievement out of failure. God has worked all these elements of failure and decay into the beauty that arrested our attention and commands our admiration. The creature itself, as St. Paul tells us, waits for redemption, and is supported by hope. "The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former,"[1] as the blessings of Redemption excel even the first glories of Creation. And in this place the Lord of Hosts will give His peace.

We hear a great deal of "the joyous Greek," yet he, too, had his tragedies, his pursuing Eumenides, his dread Nemesis, his deeply rooted sense that no man must be counted happy before he died. Mr. Ruskin has told us of "the Roman's lust of pleasure and his brutal incapacity for it." Everywhere we see this "failure of ideals," the

[1] Hagg. ii. 9.

longing for good news, good news from somewhere, good news of some sort, if it be but a temporary relief. And so we find that "the world is full of other religions," the religion of the beautiful, spiritism, Christian science, the worship of health, the exorcism of pain, the idolatry of the intellect, or an eclectic religionism.

And we clergy are asked to face all this seething impatience, much of it the product of new conditions of life, and new failures with our old Gospel, our crude and antiquated notions of "Saviour" and "Salvation," with the dead documentary hand still heavy on the living, a Church which should be progressive, and abreast of modern thought, imparting still a "Canaanitish patois" to worship and belief!

And yet this is our good news; this is our Gospel; this is the message we have to deliver. It never changes, whether it be to the wild, savage tribes or to the civilized natives of Europe; to the stagnant life of the village or the complex life of the city; it is always the same—"Salvation." We have heard it so often that we scarcely think about it; we have repeated it in so many sermons and prayers that it has become a clerical commonplace.

Voltaire was right, "*La parole a été donné à l'homme pour deguiser sa pensée.*" At least the frequent use of a creed would seem to release a man from the obligation of thinking what it means. And yet there is a tone of extreme seriousness running through the Old and New Testament alike. The recent attacks on the Athanasian Creed have led

thinking men to see, that the monitory clauses of that symbol do but reflect with uncompromising accuracy statements of equal or even greater severity in the New Testament. "The New Testament is a very severe book"; severe because it reminds us "*incertis de salute quid de gloriâ contendendum est.*" "What must I do to be saved?"[1] Whatever this meant in the mouth of the Philippian gaoler, it has a very real meaning to us, and we clergy have to supply the answer.

But perhaps we feel that this is a message as sad and hopeless as that which Isaiah was called upon to deliver.[2] It must needs fall on deaf ears, be presented before blind eyes, and appeal to hard hearts. "What must I do to get on?" "What must I do to preserve my health?" "What must I do to get a stake in the land, or sustain my life as long as I can, in this best possible of all worlds?" These things people will listen to and discuss; but "What must I do to be saved?" has an antiquarian and clerical flavour. It will neither attract nor move; it belongs to the stock-in-trade of a preacher of the past. But is this so? Are we not reading into the facts of life an assumption which has its birth in our own faithlessness and timidity?

"Salvation" is still a current term in the language of the heart. It used to mean, as we know, deliverance from the everlasting punishment of hell, which appealed with such earnestness and insistency to such minds as that of John Bunyan as to drive him

[1] Acts xvi. 30. [2] Isa. vi. 9, 10.

in the throes of a conversion to ask, "How shall I flee from the wrath to come?" Has this sense of guilt, this sense of the fear of punishment, gone from the hearts of men? It may well be seriously doubted. Deep down in the inner consciousness there is the abiding sense of a great truth as underlying the words, "though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished":[1] and, further, that in the eternal justice of things the wicked ought not to go unpunished; that retribution is a law of God, and that the minute punishment of sin is part of the certain and discoverable action of God, as vindicating the law of justice. And further, that this is not an arbitrary and precarious inference from texts, or part of a morbid estimate of the consequences of human weakness, but that the punishment which follows at least certain sins, as, for instance, drunkenness, is obvious and even dramatic. The Eumenides who followed the sinner with hands of iron and feet of lead, Nemesis who pursued the successful sinner with certain vengeance, were but the visualized experience of the ancient world in its estimate of the consequences of wrong-doing. And guilt is still a dread and awful load, where the undetected burden is often harder to bear than the penalty inflicted on discovered crime.

But the weary world, with its sad voice, may be seen to be groaning under a burden heavier than the sense of guilt and the punishment of sin, and that is the sense of its own impotence in the clutch of sin and evil.

[1] Prov. xi. 21.

It has been pointed out,[1] that there are two great cries in the world: the one is the cry for forgiveness, and the other is the cry for goodness; that is, the passionate cry for deliverance from the shame, the miserable weakness, the bitterness of always doing wrong. And our message as to all this is good news; good news as to the guilt of sin by reason of the atoning grace of the Cross; good news as to the power of sin by reason of the sanctifying influence of the Church.

> "He died that we might be forgiven,
> He died to make us good."

So we preach Christ crucified, so we bring to man the Gospel of peace.

And yet how easy it is to make all this a perfunctory message, which means nothing and effects nothing, because in our heart of hearts we have failed to believe it, or to expect any definite results from our teaching!

Most certainly we who preach and deliver the message ought to be that which in cant phraseology is represented by the expression "saved men." Preserved from corruption ourselves, we ought to be able to show in our daily life an habitual control over temptations which beset the ordinary man, to temper, for instance, worry, unkindness, greed, giving an earnest of the power to overcome even worse things, because we are in Christ Jesus. As "saved men" we ought to exhibit the meaning of the phrase in a greater roundness and

[1] Dean Church, "Cathedral and University Sermons," p. 173.

completeness of life. We must be examples of Him who is *teres et rotundus*; τετράγωνος ἄνευ ψόγου. From a cowardly concession to the doctrine of weak points, we have brought it about that we are only half-men.

We ought to be able also to exhibit a perfect belief in our methods. We are the ministers of good news, and joy is, and ever must be, one of the products of the Gospel. We ought to be able to tell men that all that is stated in our Gospel can be shown to be true, that the Fall is no myth, nor a fall upwards, but that we can trace its effects within and without, as offering an explanation of many things without it inexplicable. Sin, we can show, is just what the Bible asserts it to be, a mistake, a catastrophe, and a loss, which must be treated with all seriousness. Temptation which leads to sin is a perfectly understood process, and the punishment which follows sin may be accurately verified as in accordance with the warnings set forth in Holy Scripture. Atonement and grace are no mere theological dogmas, the creatures of controversial disputations, but living and energising realities. Here is a Gospel which is good news indeed, beyond all other messages which could be given. Here is a privilege which God has vouchsafed to us to be the ministers of its proclamation. "And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest; for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways."[1]

[1] St. Luke i. 76.

## CHAPTER II

### THE VISION

*ὁ δὲ πνευματικὸς ἀνακρίνει μὲν πάντα.*

"Væ prophetis insipientibus, qui sequuntur spiritum suum et nihil vident."

THE message of good news which the minister of the Gospel has to deliver is no easy message.

It must needs be assimilated, first of all, that is, made his own, by him who is charged to deliver it.

### I

Holy Scripture tells us of three possibilities as regards the Gospel proclamation.

The first is this, that it is possible to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in the simple experimental Gospel life;[1] the second is the possibility of making the commandment of God of none effect by human tradition;[2] or it is even possible that for our sakes men may abhor the offering of the Lord.[3]

The personal element in the presentation of the Gospel is very difficult to eradicate; perhaps

[1] Titus ii. 10. [2] St. Mark vii. 13; cf. Rom. iii. 3.
[3] 1 Sam. ii. 17.

it is not desirable that it should be eradicated, for it may be a power for good as well as for evil.

The beloved disciple tells us, in the vision that he records, that he was bidden to eat up the little book at the hand of the angel.[1] It was sweet at first, but bitter afterwards.

This has been the common experience of us all. The message which was so sweet when we first started to deliver it—why has it become so stern? Why so difficult? And yet why so simple in the face of intellectual pride, which demands that it should at least meet a foeman worthy of its steel, if it is to submit to the challenge of revelation, or to the untested claims of the supernatural?

We must not shrink from this personal assimilation, this eating of the message, whereby we become identified with it, like men possessed by an idea. We must be as certain of our revelation as the man of science is certain of his ascertained facts. We must not shrink if we are called obscurantists, or mediævalists, or think it a stigma to be credited with a clerical mind, or regard "Sacerdotalist" as a term of reproach.

We must earnestly be on our guard against a tendency which is gaining ground to throw off the identification of the man with his message. We are accused of belonging to a priestly caste, of acquiring an artificial manner, and even an unnatural voice, of posing in a stereotyped attitude of impressive influence which only repels those

[1] Rev. x. 9.

whom we would attract, and makes those ears deaf which we fain would open. However this may be, we never can hope to prevail if we approach secularized society simply as the man of the world. What mankind is looking for and will respect is the man from the other world who refuses to cast the dogmatic faith into the common medley of views and opinions, and is not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ.

But even supposing him to succeed in his disguise, how is the messenger of Christ to get rid of his haunting personality to which we have already alluded? Whether we like it or not, we become identified with our message, and our message takes its colour from the identification. He who poses as a layman will perforce deliver the message in which the ordinary layman delights. He who is an embodiment of officialism will give an official message, and receive his percentage in self-importance. We cannot proclaim the message of the Cross with an air of disinterested aloofness.

The personal element is allowed far too much influence already. If the parishioners like the man they will listen to what he says. If the priest likes his parishioners, then and then only will he be diligent in his administration towards them, until he becomes the minister to only a favoured few, visiting only those houses where he is welcome, and concerning himself only with a selected minority who reflect the current ecclesiastical feeling of the day.

Our personal influence for good or evil clings

to us like a shadow, and we cannot throw it off or neglect it. "When the multitude saw it, they marvelled, and glorified God, which had given such power unto men."[1] It is part of God's tenderness and mercy that His messages should be delivered by the human voice of those who can sympathize, answer, and comfort with the consolation by which they themselves are comforted of God.

The prophet Isaiah has described for us in three words, this taking in, or assimilation of the divine message which had been given to him. It was sometimes the vision which he had seen, or it was the burden which he took up, or sometimes the word of God which came to him.

## II

Let us think first of the vision which lies, or should lie, at the back of our message.

With what confidence it rings out! "The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah."[2]

Before we speak, we must listen; before we describe, we must see. "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen."[3] So speaks the Word of God. This is what people are looking for, the vision behind the sermon: this is what people are complaining of,

[1] St. Matt. ix. 8. [2] Isa. i. 1.
[3] St. John iii. 11.

"there is nothing in what he says." The old taunt is true, it is the voice of one who speaks, "not because he has something to say, but because he must say something." The contempt for the message has begun with contempt for the person of the preacher. In a well-known romance the writer speaks of a city which is visited by the dead, that they may reproach the living for their evil ways, and in the multitude of the visions vouchsafed to warn and cheer from the other world, it is the parish *curé* alone who sees no vision. And this too often is a true testimony.

Here is something which by God's grace can be eradicated. We can at least get rid of this initial contempt. For it may be that our hearers are not the only people who despise our sermons, there is a self-depreciation which is not modesty, and a want of effort which comes from sloth, or even from the deadly sin of pride, as in one who makes no attempt at excellence in a subject in which he believes he is doomed to mediocrity.

There are several considerations which should help us all to give to our sermons an honourable place.

In the first place, sermons are not a necessary evil imposed upon the clergy by an innate depravity of Anglican taste, which has not recovered from the state of religion symbolized by the "three-decker," and which is still prevalent in those bodies who decry Sacramental Truth. Sermons are no conventional sop to propriety, a necessary evil. They can be and they are a power. Within the

range of the writer's knowledge, individual sermons preached to an unknown audience have been found, on undoubted testimony, to have produced the following results, without any present design or knowledge on the part of the preacher. In two cases they have stopped suicide which had been contemplated. In another case a sermon has proved a turning-point in a young man's career. In another case a suggestion thrown out from the pulpit has led to the foundation of an important bishoprick. In another case a sermon casually heard induced a man in good position in a foreign land, far removed from all the usual means of grace, to start and maintain a religious service on Sundays for his dependants. While yet another led to a successful effort to stop vile conversation in a house of business.

In the smallest place there may be listening the little maid, who afterwards in the world outside will convey the news of healing to Naaman's wife, and bring the leper to the prophet. There are young boys listening, who may afterwards become missionaries in the large warehouses of the city, and be able to testify of the faith that is in them.

The squire who seems so dead to our influence may become a member of Parliament, who by reason of our faithfulness will be able to show some intelligent interest in the affairs of the Church, which are there too often treated with contemptuous hostility. There are young men who will be going out into the army and navy or the colonies, who

will bless us in after years for the principles in which we have instructed them.

Where people are ready to listen, it is the height of folly to neglect so wide an opportunity as that which is offered to us in the ministry of preaching.

We may also believe that God places us in that position in His Church, where we shall best see the vision which He vouchsafed to us, and which He wishes us to impart to others.

Men are sent here and sent there, now to the crowded town, now to the quiet village. Sometimes we have to work under those conditions which we ourselves should flee from, such as isolation, poverty, or ill-health. We have to study Christ in various aspects that we may present Him to different kinds of people. Just as we shall see on the occasion of some interesting phenomenon such as an eclipse, the scientific man will go where he is able to study the effects with the greatest precision and accuracy. It may be necessary to take a long voyage, or spend many hours in a solitary observatory. But he goes where he is sent by those who wish him to observe and chronicle results for the benefit of the scientific world. So let us remember that we are placed where we can see our vision, and therefore perhaps we are by no means the best judges of what is wanted from us, or of our own capacities. Moses deprecates being sent to deliver Israel. Jonah utterly refuses his mission. St. Paul knew what it was to be frustrated by the Spirit in his missionary plan, and even found himself in prison. It is a bad thing to

ask for this or that part of spiritual work for ourselves. It will very often end only in failure and disappointment. Our wisdom is to let God choose, for He knows the point of vision for us, and whether we are men of such power as to fulfil the task appointed to us.

It adds surely a great interest to our work to realize that we are set to see visions, and the particular vision which God reserves for us in the special post where He stations us.

We ought, therefore, to have something very special to say. "Your young men shall see visions."[1] We cannot content ourselves with the undigested fragments of other people's sermons, or with scraps out of the newspapers, or with crude remarks on the questions of the day. God, we may believe, wishes us, in the truest sense of the word, to be original, "Open Thou mine eyes: that I may see the wondrous things of Thy law."[2] We must tell out, once more, what we have seen.

Hence it is that we need much more spiritual labour. Devotion can never be treated with contempt, in a way which we should recognize as useless in any intellectual or scientific study.

God has something to show us through meditation, which is not the mere reading of a devotional book. He has messages to give us, and mysteries to show us through the recitation of the Divine office, which is not merely a mechanical exercise, but the soul's approach to God.

It is not what we read so much, which is

[1] Joel ii. 28. [2] Ps. cxix. 18.

valuable, as what we assimilate. We need what the artist calls "atmosphere," that is seeing a fact in relation to its surroundings, and not as a hard, isolated fact. We must come to our people like men from another world; and we must remember that like the spies who spied out the Promised Land, we have to bring back a report to those who are apathetic, who dislike God's promises, and are even hostile to them. And so we must bring with us grapes, the fruits which we have discovered, fresh from the Promised Land, something that we have found, something that we know; as one who says, "Trust me, I have been there."

Dr. George Adam Smith, in his exposition of the prophecy of Isaiah, speaks of "the escapes" of the prophet in which from time to time he seems to soar away into higher regions where he can draw a fuller breath, and inhale a purer air, in the midst of his visions of gloom and denunciations of wrath which was to come upon God's people. So we should try to escape out of the troubles of life, out of the monotony of our message or its recurring routine into the purer atmosphere of heaven and into the felt presence of God; to realize with the Psalmist what is meant by the words, "Thou art a place to hide me in."[1] And so day by day to receive our message from God Himself, as the proclamation of something which we have heard, as the vision of what we have seen.

And we must never forget that in God's revealed Word, the Bible, there is an inexhaustible

[1] Ps. xxxii. 8.

seam of wealth, which every one may work for himself. It is for us to get the people back to the Bible, which has been so weakly and foolishly aspersed, and to say to each and to all, "Come and see." "Thine eyes shall see the King in His beauty, They shall behold the land of far distances."[1] Like St. John at the foot of the cross, we shall see mysteries—the pierced side, the mystery of the water and the blood, the revelation of atonement.

Once more we need to pray with our whole heart. "Open Thou mine eyes: that I may see the wondrous things of Thy law."[2]

## III

But Isaiah has allowed us to meditate on the lesson which he himself received, and has put on record, how to see visions, how to behave in the presence of mysteries, in fact the preliminaries of spiritual contemplation. He points us to a lesson which he himself once received, when he was introduced into the presence of beings who were themselves worshipping and reposing in the full light of God's presence.[3] And as he gazes he sees as his first impression that everything is veiled and awe-stricken, there is an all-clouding smoke, a trembling temple and a shadow of wings. He is learning at the very outset that we are not going to snatch visions of God, with a dictionary and a grammar and the last book of fearless criticism. Bishop

[1] Isa. xxxiii. 17. [2] Ps. cxix. 18.
[3] Isa. vi.

King used to speak of the awe with which Dr. Pusey, in his professorial lectures, would approach the Messianic Psalm of the Passion on which he was about to comment.[1] As if the presence of God so pervaded it, that he feared to touch it. There is little of that hesitation now, where men sit in judgment on Psalms directly ascribed to the Holy Ghost, and bring God before the bar of their own intellectual judgment.

We must veil our face, by a strange paradox, as a preliminary to seeing visions. We need much more reverence in handling divine truth. The God of the Old Testament is the God of the New Testament, and the God of our own daily experience as well. It may be that while we handle the Word of God lightly we receive even a spiritual damage, like a doctor who has experimented without due precaution with some potent remedy of as yet unknown power. "The Word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."[2]

It is one of the saddest signs of the times to see how desecrated the Bible and all holy themes have become, in the ordinary speech and writings of the world. We need in our dealings with God a great deal more of the reverence which consists in a respect for things higher than ourselves. It is possible to spread out religion before our people,

[1] Ps. xxii. [2] Heb. iv. 12.

like a stained glass window laid out upon the floor. It was designed to be seen with a light coming through it, without which it is but dead glass and lead.

It is recorded when the nave of York Minster was gutted by fire in 1840, that when the great roof fell and a sudden glare of flame lit up the smoke and darkness within, the painted crucifix in the west window of the south aisle shone out distinct and beautiful, and the cordon of soldiers, which surrounded the building to keep back the crowds, involuntarily raised their hands and saluted.

There is a light which ought to be seen shining through the pages of God's Word, and that light exhibits to the eye of faith the form of the Son of God in those pages which, beginning at Moses and all the prophets, testify of Him.

"With twain He covered His feet"—so we read. We shall need more than reverence if we are to see our vision, we shall need also to consider our ways and be wise. It is impossible to see the vision without the due and proper keeping of the feet. "Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground."[1] Look at the photographer who has received on sensitive plates some beautiful impressions of what he has seen. He wishes to fix them, that he may show them to others. But if he lets the light get in, his labour is wasted, the impressions vanish.

[1] Exod. iii. 5.

"The world is too much with us ; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers :
Little we see in nature that is ours :
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!"[1]

Why have the impressions of our Ordination, of our last retreat, of those "days of the Son of Man,"[2] whatever they be in our life, vanished? Is it because we have let the world in? We need dark rooms in which to develop impressions, places and times of penitence and confession, where we can get rid of the glare and heat of the world. We need the dark rooms of solitude. The cheery atmosphere of the clergy house has its dangers as well as its helps. The activities of the age may drive and dissipate and render callous the susceptibilities of the heart. "Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee."[3] So Nathaniel prepared in times of quiet for the crisis of vocation when it came.

Everything conspires to tell us that we children of this age, if any, need the dark room of developing impressions; we priests who are called upon to gaze must also note and compare, or we shall find that in our people's joys and in our people's sorrows, we shall have to say with Elisha, "The Lord hath hid it from me, and hath not told me."[4]

And Isaiah also saw that God is not honoured by mere idle dreams. There is activity, there is the flapping of wings, "With twain they did fly," thus keeping themselves poised in the attitude of adoration before Almighty God.

[1] Wordsworth's "Sonnets," 1801. [2] St. Luke xvii. 22.
[3] St. John i. 48. [4] 2 Kings iv. 27.

Why is there not more activity in the direct worship of God, more concentration of purpose, more recognition of the dignity and difficulty of Divine service?

There are activities enough in the ministrations which form so large a part of our daily routine. God forbid that we should deny a real obligation and a real value to the manifold expressions of the Church's benevolence towards human needs. Our Lord Jesus Christ was more often appealed to in matters which concerned the needs of the body than He was in matters which concerned the welfare of the soul. And He never refused to help. But still it is a sorry thing if all our energies are so spent in attending to institutions, committee meetings, entertainments and parochial engagements, that we have but little time and little appetite for the direct service of God.

The contemplation of the vision which we were set to see, which we have opportunities of seeing, from which our message will largely take colour and shape, must form a large part of our spiritual work. The message we have to deliver should surely be the outcome of real observation faithfully and independently made. In all branches of service, men are calling out now for personal research. Observations and experiments are often being made, as by doctors and scientific men, in times of stress and difficulty, often at the risk of their own lives that they may benefit humanity. We read, not so long ago, of the heroic doctor who found himself smitten down by the plague, which he had

been combating, knowing himself to be dying, yet writing down from hour to hour, as long as he was able, a record of his symptoms for the benefit of the medical world.

Surely the priest should understand what to do with those opportunities which come to him day by day, of study, analysis, and verification, of knowing and seeing God.

Thousands of sermons are preached Sunday by Sunday on the Gospel of the day. How many show any traces of individual research in things spiritual? How much is recorded and used from the chronicle of experience?

We have to learn to see, and learn to hear, and learn to record observations. And the message of God will not be delivered in its intensity unless we do. For God does not merely speak by us but through us.

Did we but know this, how different our ministrations would be! Then our sermons would not be the unwilling drudgery of a forced exercise, but a constraint would be laid upon the speaker, compelling him to utterance, and making him eloquent in spite of himself. Like St. Paul he would say, "For though I preach the Gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the Gospel!"[1]

[1] 1 Cor. ix. 16.

## CHAPTER III

### THE BURDEN

"In hoc ipsum excitavi te, ut ostendam in te virtutem Meam, et ut annuncietur nomen Meum in universâ terrâ."

THE assimilation of the message to be delivered, which both Ezekiel and St. John were called upon to make, under the symbol of eating the book which contained it, comes before us now in another form. Isaiah, who has spoken to us of the vision which he saw as a prelude to prophecy, speaks to us also of "the burden" as a description of his prophetic message.

The word is a significant one with its original meaning of weight, as being something which is heavy or even sinister. So it is said of the Divine sentence on Ahab: "Remember how that, when I and thou rode together after Ahab his father, the Lord laid this burden upon him.[1] "The burden" in this sense may mean the prophet's weight of heavy woe. But it also means, that which is taken up and borne, like the freighting of a ship—the cargo which it has to deliver. The scoffers in the book of Jeremiah also allude to the word (which is not uncommon in Holy Scripture): "And when this people, or the prophet, or a priest, shall ask thee

[1] 2 Kings ix. 25; cf. Zech. i. 3.

saying, What is the burden of the Lord? thou shalt then say unto them, What burden? I will even forsake you, saith the Lord."[1] This is the Lord's judgment on those who so associate heaviness with it.

So will the good news which we have to deliver become assimilated with ourselves—heavy, formed into a burden or cargo which we have to deliver to people in general from the pulpit, to different individual souls in our ministry, souls to which we have to bear "the remarkable riches of Christ" in a message which sometimes seems to lay upon them a burden heavier than they can bear, in the ministry of penance.

So we have to deliver to some Ahaz, in his insolent frivolity, the stern solemnity of God's purpose. We have to bring to Hezekiah on his sick-bed the message of death; or to Hezekiah besieged the message of comfort. We have to rouse the careless, recover the fallen, restore the penitent, build up the faithful, bringing home to them the weighty message, the good news which God would deliver into their very soul.

## I

"The burden of the Lord." Let us look upon it as the freighting of our vessel, the gathering in of the burden into the hold of the ship, as much as we can carry, as much as we can deliver, the cargo of our life.

[1] Jer. xxiii. 33.

And we feel at once that this burden was not gathered to-day nor yesterday; God has been storing it up with us through many years; we were formed to carry it, raised up to deliver it, the message which perhaps we only could discharge. "For this same purpose have I raised thee up."[1] "Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"[2] The Divine Master calls unto Himself "whom He would."[3] God knowing me, knowing my past, knowing what I have to deliver, has called me, and all my life, in every part of it, is worked into the prophetic burden which I carry.

So St. Paul is able to deliver not only the message which came to him at his conversion, but as one who had been a Pharisee of the Pharisees in his early years, was better able to deal with all the insidious attacks of Judaism, which soon pressed upon the Church.

Every life that is lived has its message to the world, but it is not always delivered. It has been pointed out as regards the selection by God of the Judges in Israel, that in times of invasion and oppression, the deliverer arose from the locality nearest the seat of attack. So now also, a man with a scientific training is raised up as best able to deal with scientific difficulties and the dangerous assaults of a so-called liberalism. So the man of the world, as he used to delight to be called, finds himself stored with a message to society, which he is peculiarly competent to deliver. The man of

[1] Rom. ix. 17. [2] Esther iv. 14. [3] St. Mark iii. 13.

physical strength and athletic distinction finds himself, as another Samson, able to lay before God a consecrated gift of strength. It was said by the vicar of a well-known parish, who was instrumental in training a great number of curates in the work of the Ministry, that he verily believed that every one of those who had served under him had been able to reach some one soul, which others, it may be, had failed to touch. Each had his own message, of each it was true, "for this same purpose have I raised thee up."

So each of us, as he looks back over life, may see how all along God has been storing us with His burden, the freighting of the message which we have to deliver.

The most precious freight of all is that which represents an unspotted life. It has been said of the prophet Samuel—"Samuel is the chief type in ecclesiastical history, of holiness, of growth, of a new creation without conversion; and his mission is an example of the special missions which such characters are called to fulfil. In proportion as the different stages of life have sprung naturally and spontaneously out of each other, without any abrupt revulsion, each serves as a foundation on which the other may stand; each makes the foundation of the whole more sure and stable. In proportion as our own foundation is thus stable, and as our own minds and hearts have grown up gradually and firmly, without any violent disturbance or wrench to one side or the other: in that proportion is it the more possible to view with calmness and moderation the

difficulties and differences of others—to avail ourselves of the new methods and new characters that the advance of time throws in our way—return from present troubles to the pure and untroubled well of our early years—to preserve and to communicate the child-like faith, changed doubtless in form, but the same in spirit, in which we first knelt in humble prayer for ourselves and others, and drank in the first impressions of God and of heaven."[1] So Dr. Illingworth tells us as regards Innocence. "Again, a conscience that acts truly, and a mind that is in control, naturally intensify the whole force of a character. For much of the available energy of most men has to be spent in undoing the results, making up for the misrule, unlearning the mistakes, unravelling the tangled threads of their own past time and opportunities—much of their energy, because it is infinitely harder to erase than to impress. . . . But the innocent in proportion to their innocence are spared this labour. No phantom fires mislead them, born of the miasma of past sins. No secret shame, no agony of evil, no weary sense of hopelessness have to be met and overcome at each forward step. The whole energy of their character is at once available for use."[2]

The innocent life gives a wonderful power of conviction to the message; as from one who has realized the full grace of Holy Baptism, who has been braced by Confirmation and fed by Holy Communion. These are they who by their steadfastness

[1] Dean Stanley, "Jewish Church," i. p. 409.

[2] Illingworth, "University and Cathedral Sermons," pp. 109, 110.

give stability to the Church, men not easily moved or shaken in their integrity, who can say to all inquirers without fear of confusion, "Come and see."

But the life may have a different burden to this. Its freight may have been taken in out of a storm-tossed career. Its merchandize, it may be, has been brought from afar, in peril and stress and not without loss. A St. Augustine or St. Ignatius Loyola and many another will occur to us, who have delivered out of their treasure the message of a weather-beaten experience. These are they who can say, "Thou hast known my soul in adversities." They have met the full blast of temptation, and they have known the power of God in resisting it. They are men who have learned to turn the experience of evil into the beauty of humility, the tenderness of sympathy and the strength of power. Men who know what it is to be tempted, and not to be tempted above that they are able. In any way, the message of the life will form a large part of the burden which must needs be delivered. It will appear in the sermons preached, in the word spoken, in the influence felt. It may form the healing shadow of a St. Peter passing by, which overshadows the sin-stricken and the weary. So it is told of Francis Borgia "that he was asked to preach at a certain church in a distant city. On his arrival he was too ill to speak, and he requested some one to occupy his place. 'No,' said the priest who had summoned him; 'only mount the pulpit, say nothing, and come

away.' He did so; hearts were touched, people burst into tears, and the confessionals were filled with penitents. He was a man of prayer."[1] On the other hand, the personal element which cannot be hid, is sometimes a deadly power. It mounts up, as it were, as an *advocatus Diaboli*, in face of the preacher, confutes his arguments, and paralyzes his eloquence. He is brilliant but unconvincing, the effect of the words is dissipated so that they cannot strike home. An accusing voice rises up, it may be only a prejudice, so that he who hears him say, "I do not trust that man. He is not one to whom I could bring my troubles." The sermon of the life is contradicting the sermon of the lips.

But the burden of the Lord, what we have to carry and to deliver, is something more definite than this. Theoretically we have been preparing ourselves all our lives by education for the general work of God, specifically by the special study of theology. And our people have a right to expect professional fulness in us. A doctor who does not keep abreast of surgical and medical science will soon lose his patients. A lawyer must be able to fall back on established cases, and be familiar with recent decisions. It is all-important that we keep ourselves freshened and alive with ever-new stores of learning. The story is told of Dr. Arnold, that one evening he was walking in the neighbourhood of Rugby with a friend, who pressed him to prolong his walk in the bright and fresh air, beyond the

[1] "Post-Mediæval Preachers," pp. 132, 133, the Rev. S. Baring Gould.

time which they had contemplated. "No," said Dr. Arnold, "I must return to prepare my Thucydides lesson for my sixth form to-morrow." "What!" said his friend. "Do you, the greatest living authority on Thucydides in Europe, think it necessary to prepare your lesson for a class of boys? It is incredible." "Yes," said Dr. Arnold; "I will not give my boys food to feed on which is not fresh."

The general subject of reading, which is a commonplace of clerical retreats, will always be a difficult one and repugnant to an age of exaggerated activity. But there is no doubt that reading, in what is understood by that term, should form part of the lading of our sermons. People say to the younger clergy, "Do not content yourselves with merely reading up for your sermons." But surely whatever else they ought to do, this they must do. There is a good deal to be done in reading round our sermons, to see whether we have rightly interpreted our subject; to see what other people have written and said about it.

So we find in the prophets a working in of previous prophecies. "Isaiah is not ashamed of building on the foundations of those who have gone before him. All that there is of general instruction in Joel, Micah, or Amos, is reproduced in Isaiah." Our burden would be fuller, more worth unlading, if it were loaded more with what others have thought, who are wiser and better than ourselves. There is no doubt that people are despising sermons because,

as they say, there is nothing in them. And the subjects which we ought to be discussing from the pulpit in the full strength and power of theology and Christian tradition, are being discussed in the newspapers and by destructive critics. So that the doctrines of the Faith come to be regarded first as open questions, then as inexplicable, and finally as absurd, and the world groans and finds itself Arian.

Without endeavouring to force controversial sermons on our people, at least let them carry some burden, and not resemble an after-dinner speech by some one who is called upon to respond on a subject of which he knows nothing, and says it.

But do not let us forget that the burden of God comes to us sometimes in strange ways. It may not be always the message as out of a book, or the defence of the faith which God would especially store with us. There may be an attitude and a policy which His servants have to shadow forth. He Himself took up the burden of an attitude of opposition to the wrong trend of life which had become more and more pronounced since the day when Eve saw that "the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise."[1] The Cross is not a preaching of mere asceticism, but a vigorous protest against the life of desire.

It was thus that Isaiah had the burden of austerity committed to him.[2] His dress was to be

[1] Gen. iii. 6. [2] Isa. xx. 2.

sackcloth, at times he had to be a portent, walking naked and barefoot. His two sons,[1] by the command of God, were to represent in their very names the wrath of the Almighty. Maher-shalel-hash-baz, "Speed the prey," or Shear-jashub, "The remnant shall return."[2]

So Ezekiel had to witness in the desolation of his wedded life,[3] and Hosea in domestic misery.[4] These troubles were part of the freighting of their ship, the burden of their prophecy. And so now the disabling trouble, as it seemed at the time, breaks down the opposition, or elicits the better feeling in the parish which was dormant, or overspread with prejudice.

It may be that the trouble which God is now putting on the clergy in straitened incomes amounting even to hard poverty, may be the message which they have to deliver to a luxurious age.

It certainly stands out as a great truth, that all our lives, our circumstances, our present and our past, form part of the burden of our preaching. They make up the cargo which our message hopes to land in the human heart. It is God Who stores us and ladens us with a rich treasure that we may help others, if only we are faithful to the burden of the Lord. For He is "the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God."[5]

[1] Isa. viii. 2-4. [2] Isa. vii. 3. [3] Ezek. xxiv. 18.
[4] Hos. i. 2. [5] 2 Cor. i. 4.

## II

But there is associated with this word "burden" a more definitely sad meaning than this, an idea of heaviness in the message itself. This stands out with some clearness in the call of Isaiah, recorded in the sixth chapter of his prophecy, which seems to have made a great impression, and is quoted more than once in the New Testament. "And He said, Go and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes: lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed. Then said I, Lord, how long?"[1] The prophet is laden with an unpopular message, a message which would fail, a message which apparently was likely to do more harm than good.

No preacher likes to think of gross hearts, heavy ears and closed eyes, a message doomed to failure from the beginning, and aggravated by rejection. And yet such missions are not unknown at the present day. There are places where earnest men are doing devoted work day after day, and yet have nothing to show for it, in their own time. They labour, and other men enter into their labours: or it may be there is no visible return at all, but the district reverts to its old uncultivated state, and love and labour, prayer and exhortation, seem

[1] Isa. vi. 10, 11.

all lost together. It may be that the present indifference which is so widespread and so deadly is going to continue; manifesting itself in the poor congregations, in some places, the loss of any sense of obligation as to Divine worship, the frivolity which can only play around religious things and refuses to be serious. Certainly the attack gets bolder, and it is no longer an attack from without, there is a fraternizing with the forces of unbelief from within. The formulæ of belief can no longer be trusted to convey their plain meaning. In matters of dogmatic belief, men are no longer men of their word, and there is a deep sense of unreality, disgust, and suspicion; and in some cases, we much fear, a serious warping of the conscience, and a loss of delicate appreciation of the refinements of truth. The attack on the Incarnation, long prepared for, has come at last—the rejected testimony of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms, and even of our Blessed Lord as an infallible Teacher, has left men face to face with the most vital dogma of Christianity, which they no longer know how to receive. And men are indifferent, as in the face of an uncertainty, and cold in the presence of that which seems little better than a doubtful hypothesis.

It is hard for those whose ministry coincides with the ebbing tide in a period of reaction. It is possible to offer ourselves as Gibeonites to the restored Christianity, and read the Bible as a poetry book, and preach moral essays. But if we are faithful we shall surely find a strong

temptation and a heavy burden, while we persevere with the foolishness of preaching, and the offence of the Cross.

Or this burden may have in it even more a particular and individual heaviness. The reality of our mission turns out to be so different in its stern facts to the romantic vision which we had formed of it. Jonah shrinks back from a mission to Nineveh which is in conflict with the political ideas which he had formed as to the attitude of Israel to foreign despotisms. Ananias felt surprised and annoyed that he should be supposed to find any good in so notorious a persecutor as Saul, or to judge him capable of receiving Christian Baptism. Philip is ordered to exercise his missionary functions in a region which was desert. It was a sore trial to the early Jewish Church to be called upon to believe in preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles. We may have a difficult function to perform under God's orders, such as was that of the angel who was sent to stop Balaam in his wilfulness, or of him whom God sent to be the messenger of His wrath in bringing the plague on Jerusalem. God will often give to His messengers a sinister and serious burden to deliver. Here is one who has to advise people wiser and better than himself from the tribunal where God has officially placed him. Here is one, who has to tell Jeroboam's wife, or King Hezekiah, God's message of death, or to prepare the soul for its struggle with its last great enemy. Here is another, who at his own risk has to deal

with cases of deadly sin. Our only chance is to be a sympathetic and faithful messenger. We dare not shrink or change our message or convert it into some colourless residuum which produces no revulsion or opposition in those to whom we must deliver it. We must not "think," as did Saul in his dealing with Amalek, and overlay the purpose of God with our own gloss which we put upon it.

We read in old times of the slave who was sent out with the message branded on his head, which was overgrown with his hair. Before it could be read, the hair which enveloped it must be shaved. So with us, there is too often a wilful overgrowth of likes and dislikes which conceal the message which God has branded on our life. Men have to cut away the encumbering selfishness before they can decipher that which God designed to reveal through us and by us.

## III

But the phrase "the Burden of the Lord" may be more frequently interpreted to mean, the oracle of God, the verdict of God. It carries with it some of that great assertion of authoritative power, "Thus saith the Lord."

And this is a complaint which is sometimes raised against our sermons. It is objected to us that we are too dogmatic, or that we lay down the law; and yet we must be dogmatic and precise, if we would be faithful; we do not deal with views and

opinions, but with the deposit of the Faith; but at the same time we must remember that we have to deal with men who are dowered with free will, which we must not attempt to coerce. We can see for ourselves how our Blessed Lord respected both these facts. On the one hand, He never will lower truth. Nicodemus, the ruler of the Jews, must learn how to receive the paradoxes of the Faith. "How can these things be?" is an attitude of the mind which must be worked through to its legitimate and only explanation. The rich young ruler must go away unsatisfied rather than a counsel of perfection be put on one side. The men of Capernaum, and even the disciples themselves, must be offended, and desert their Teacher rather than the truth be lowered. Pontius Pilate, troubled and hesitating, must decide on no issue short of the truth. But at the same time there is no dogmatizing for dogma's sake, no forcing of the intellectual assent. The parables are spoken with the purpose of veiling truth. The miracles are, in many cases, not to be talked about by those who had experienced their wonderful power. "He spake the word unto them," we are told, "as they were able to hear it."[1] He tenderly measures the capacity of the Apostles, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now."[2] So in the proclamation of the great decree of God to Mary, the angel Gabriel waits for her consent, to the willing co-operation with God's inscrutable purpose. "And Mary said, Behold the handmaid

[1] St. Mark iv. 33. [2] St. John xvi. 12.

of the Lord : be it unto me according to thy word."[1] There must be no rough forcing of the wills of our people.

*Sic volo, sic jubeo, stet pro ratione voluntas.*

This is not the way of God. He graduates by easy stages of growth the gift of life in His Church.[2] Whereas we are tempted to force, to feed with meat and not with milk, to trick, entrap or drive, without having secured the consent of those whom we thus hope to win. But opposition and prejudice, as we call it, are part of the protest of the man, who is thus saying, "Lead me: do not drive me. I am free."

Surely in view of our estimate of "the burden" of the Lord, there are two dangers which we must avoid. The one is the proclaiming of our message with triumphant emphasis to hearts unprepared. The endeavour to carry the citadel by assault without any previous bombardment. The other danger is that of substituting something easier and lighter in a spirit of concessionism,[3] and to play for success by a sacrifice of truth. But we must not alter its character. It is a burden, and it should be weighty. It must ever be a burden, and so will ever press upon us. It can never be anything else than a burden, inasmuch as it is a strong and rigorous decree, an oracle fresh from the mouth of God.

[1] St. Luke i. 38.

[2] See Newman, "Parochial and Plain Sermons," vol. i., Sermon VIII.

[3] See "Letters of Wm. Bright," Kidd and Medd, p. 343.

It is the great decree of our Sovereign Lord. His voice, His fulness and authority echo and resound through it all, as the recurring rhythm or burden of a melodious song, "He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes." [1]

[1] St. Matt. vii. 29.

# CHAPTER IV

## THE WORD

"Et es eis quasi carmen musicum, quod suavi dulcique sono canitur; et audiunt verba tua, et non faciunt ea. Et cum venerit quod prædictum est (ecce enim, venit!) tunc scient, quod prophetes fuerit inter eos."

THE Vision, the Burden, the Word of the Lord—so the good news forms itself by assimilation with our personality. We have thought of the source of our message in the vision, the substance of our message in the burden, we may now think of the clothing the expression of our message. And we are prepared to find that this is important. For with God we admire not only the thing done, but the way in which it is done. Human machinery cannot stop to think of the blackened skies, the poisoned stream, and the withered grass. God performs all the functions of the universe in ordered majesty and beauty. "The heavens declare the glory of God: and the firmament sheweth His handywork."[1]

We in the Church have learned to think a good deal of ritual, that is, of the clothing of our services, surely we ought to think a good deal also of the

[1] Ps. xix. 1.

clothing of our message. The prophets ever fell back upon the fact that their mouth was uttering the very word of the Lord. "I have put My words in thy mouth."[1] "I will make My words in thy mouth fire."[2] "I will open thy mouth, and thou shalt say unto them."[3] And then let us compare this great assurance with the feebleness of our utterance.

So Isaiah saw his message visualized, as if it stood out before him. "The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem."[4] This is very different from the "few plain words" which we sometimes attempt to speak without thought and with little preparation. It has been said of poetry that it is "*L'exquise expression d'impressions exquises*," or "*La poésie c'est la vérité endimanchée.*" We ought not to think with less care than this of the clothing of our message.

## I

First of all, then, quite naturally, we must consider the language of the message, the medium, that is, through which it must be conveyed, and at once we perceive that it is all important that it should be a message which is understood. It is of no avail that we speak mysteries, if they cannot be understood.[5] It must be a message which shall carry; a message like the arrow which hit Ahab, even if it be shot at a venture;[6] a message which

[1] Isa. li. 16.
[2] Jer. v. 14.
[3] Ezek. iii. 27.
[4] Isa. ii. 1.
[5] See 1 Cor. xiv. 2.
[6] 1 Kings xxii. 34.

will pierce. "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." [1]

And perhaps we have an example of what the language of a sermon ought to be, and of the effect of that language, in the account of the first Pentecostal outburst—"every man heard them speak in his own language." [2] Every one in that motley crowd received his own message without effort and in sympathetic expression. Surely here is an ideal for the preacher to aim at in that which is one of his great difficulties, namely, the different audiences which he has to address, and the different classes of people in the same audience. Every one, when we speak, should hear us speak in his own language.

## II

And here we are face to face with the great need for preparation on the preacher's part. It is absolutely shocking, considering the great interests which are involved, that the speaker should get up to speak, trusting to his fluency and stock of platitudes. This, however, must be considered more fully later. There are two sorts of preparation, one remote and the other proximate; let us therefore first think of the remote. How is the vision which we have seen, and the burden which we bear,

[1] Heb. iv. 12. [2] Acts ii. 6.

to be clothed in a medium which will ensure for it an entrance through the crowded gate, where one impression treads down another, and thoughts and fancies present themselves in bewildering confusion; and where noise and attractiveness, coupled with promises and threats, secure a ready entrance to the understanding from those who determine to make themselves heard? How is the message which we wish to lodge to penetrate? How is the sermon to get in?

There is the little knot of men and women for whom we have a message. Many of the young and most unemployed have fled already at the very prospect of that unutterable tedium which they have learned to associate with a sermon; and many of those who remain have assumed the stolid attitude of indifference, as of those who must needs put up with an uncongenial duty inflicted upon them.

Once more, how is the sermon to get in? It must be winged, worded aright, clothed, first of all with sympathy. When Beethoven, now driven in on himself with deafness, wrote one of his great Masses, he said it was written "from the heart to the heart." Our sermon must come from the inner chamber of the heart, seeking for a heart in which it can rest. We are reminded of our Blessed Lord's words in His instruction to His Apostles on the occasion of their first mission. "When ye come into an house, salute it. And if the house be worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it be not worthy, let your peace return to you."[1] Surely

[1] St. Matt. x. 12, 13.

when we begin to think of the message which we wish to deliver, besides the books which we consult, the meditation we have made, the vision which has appeared to us, and the experiences which we have had, we shall try and bring before us the people to whom we must speak. We shall say to ourselves this is not an essay but a message. I am not sent to start in public curious hypotheses and crude speculations. It is not for me to say everything that can be said against the truth, and very little that can be said for it, bidding my audience to decide for themselves. I am not seeking to propound open questions, but to deliver certain truths. While helping the doubters, I may very possibly add to their number, for a bad advocate is a very dangerous friend. But, of course, it may happen that the way to truth is blocked in the minds of those who will hear me, by negative criticism, or the half-veiled scepticism of some popular novel; if so, I must cast about to help them, taking care not to perplex rather than help, to aggravate rather than allay doubt, by my ignorance or want of appreciation of the difficulty, and how to meet it. Nicodemus, St. Thomas, or the doubting brethren may often be best met in private, where the needs of the many are not swallowed up in the difficulties of the few.

As a rule we minister to congregations which are a mixture of many elements. There are the good, the learned, the critical, the respectable, the small tradesmen or the farmers, or both, the domestic and farm servants, the clerks and

assistants, the boys and girls generally, the careless, the sinful, and the sad, and in view of these collectively and severally, I must try and keep before me the difficult task that every man shall hear me speak each in his own language the wonderful works of God. And I have to remember that to be able to make a thing really simple, intelligible and plain, needs a very thorough mastery of the subject.

The better educated do not dislike a plain statement if it is based on knowledge, and the poorly educated do not dislike a learned statement if it is plain.

It is sympathy that will help us here more than anything else. Sympathy which says, "Put yourself in his place." This is the only instruction, I remember, that many of them get at all; and how terribly they need it. There were two popular pictures painted by Sir John Millais exhibited some years ago: the one, entitled "My First Sermon," exhibited a little girl alert and wondering as she sat erect in the old green baize pew; the other, entitled "My Second Sermon," represented the same little girl in her high pew fast asleep. It was an easy suggestion of the humorist that there should be yet another picture, entitled "My Third Sermon," which represented the pew and no child at all. We must not lose our people because we neglect to help them. The sheep of the Good Shepherd "know not the voice of strangers."[1] We remember all those passages which breathe of the sympathy of God in

[1] St. John x. 5.

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dealing with men. "God so loved the world."[1] "Then Jesus beholding him loved him."[2] "And Jesus . . . was moved with compassion toward them."[3] "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!"[4]

How infinitely removed is a message like this which you are trying to lodge, in which you think of your people, from the essay to which you wish them to listen, and think of you!

And how is this language of sympathy to be learned? What is its grammar? What is its dictionary? Surely it is to be learned in the homes of the people and in contact with their lives. We read of the Incarnate Word "He knew what was in man;"[5] and if we pretend to be ministers of the Word, here too we must speak from intimate knowledge the things which we have seen and heard.

Here at once we are brought face to face with the old question of parochial visitation. This surely cannot be discussed academically on *à priori* grounds. A priest who never visits his people, and neither wishes nor intends to do so, will not be at a loss to discover reasons which prove to him that visiting is useless and a mere waste of time. And yet at the same time, if he will ask any practical expert in the matter, he will tell him that

[1] St. John iii. 16. [2] St. Mark x. 21. [3] St. Matt. xiv. 14.
[4] St. Matt. xxiii. 37. [5] St. John ii. 25.

in neglecting to visit he is turning his back on one of the keenest of the joys of his ministry. A priest does not know his peculiar joy who does not know the hearts and lives of his people. In Confession he sees one aspect of the soul's history; at the home, in the daily lives of his people, he is permitted to share in the romance, the tragedy, the comedy of human existence. Here he gathers information and intelligence which are of the utmost advantage to the advancing army. Here he receives lessons and warnings which guide him in his difficult task. It carries also with it a more living power of intercession. It is dry work interceding for the letters of the alphabet, or anonymous personalties in peculiar moral and mental situations. Here intercession seems forced upon you, where all human power seems to fail. Here its difficulty becomes manifest, in view of the forces arrayed against us. Visiting carries with it also the power of preaching. "Come, see a Man, which told me all things that ever I did."[1] It is then that we know what people are looking for and what they really want.

How strangely every man is a centre round which, to him, all things seem to revolve! The child thinks that everything around him, the sunshine and the rain, the movements of men and women, are all designed to give him pleasure or pain. The boy regards parochial and even wider politics for what they mean to him. The man with a wider outlook has but little wider ambitions.

[1] St. John iv. 29.

The different professional men see only one side of questions and affairs, as they immediately appeal to their interests. Each is moving in his own little circle, and we have to learn to get into that circle. As it is, our sermon may stand quite outside it all, and only be a meddlesome interruption to the real business of life, or a wearisome piece of routine, and to be avoided. But at the same time they need a message, they would welcome a message. There is a greed of newspapers, and, to a certain extent, of books,—why not of sermons? The answer is, because we do not know the people's language, because we stand outside them all as strangers. And yet here and there, where we have been accessible, or where we have penetrated within the charmed circle, we have found out how much they really need, and how much they welcome an intelligent help, which they can trust and respect.

And this brings us to the necessity of translating. Our message must be translated into the vernacular, and this is exceedingly difficult. "The pulpit manner," as it is sometimes called, means very often that we are speaking in an alien language, and in terms not understood by those whom we are addressing. They too are describing the things which we wish to convey in terms not understood by us. Here comes in the need of illustration, parable and metaphor, the transferring of truths into a medium which will be more readily understood than it would be in the terms of abstract theology. But at the same time there must be no

slang, no vulgarity, no degrading of the dignity of the pulpit. This is quite unnecessary. If we first understand what we mean ourselves, we can the more easily turn and adapt it, so that they to whom we speak may be able to understand it also, conveyed in the language of their daily life with a due and proper valuation of its terms.

We come now to the proximate preparation of the sermon. The details of its preparation must occupy a good deal of thought and care. This preparation will of course vary with different people. We all have our own methods; and in a book of this kind it would hardly be possible to give details. But this much is certain, in a work of this importance there must be no grudging of time, trouble, and even labour in seeing and providing for the conveying of the message which we seek to deliver in the best way.

And to this end we must resolutely fight against a preliminary helplessness which sends us to our preparation disheartened and hopeless; which says in effect preaching is not my gift, and therefore it is but waste of time to withdraw myself from parish activities to write a sermon. There may be even a sort of pride which forbids making an effort lest a subsequent failure should confirm the verdict of incompetency.

But, as in the sight of God, we ought to think of the vanishing excellence of preaching, and of the complaints loud and long as to its degradation. Rhetoric, eloquence, the study of style are not things to be neglected. Why is it that the average

French preacher has so much more grace and real style than the ordinary Englishman has? It is not the old question between what is called *extempore* preaching and a written sermon. A preacher who has nothing to say will not command attention because he utters a few disjointed thoughts with a Bible in his hand. Neither need the preacher who has written down every word which he has to say think that he thereby discards all need of eloquence, and must simply read out his written essay to a sleepy congregation. The so-called *extempore* preacher will need the application of him who writes his sermon, and he who writes his sermons must borrow from the *extempore* preacher the power of speaking as distinct from reading; but both will need to study the grace of rhetoric and the power of expression.

If we listen to the voice of God in nature, "The voice of the Lord is a glorious voice."[1] The prophet Isaiah himself, whose message we are considering, has clothed his message in words of beauty and power; and there are not wanting cases where his word in itself has moved men to repentance. If we study again the greatest of all preachers, we see the beauty of the parables and the exquisite tenderness of expression all making their appeal. "Full of grace are thy lips, because God hath blessed thee for ever."[2]

There is a charm and a persuasiveness in oratory which helps our message, and cannot, on that account alone, be neglected; but also the beauty of oratory

[1] Ps. xxix. 4. [2] Ps. xlv. 3.

is a thing to be desired in itself. There is a need of multiplying beauty whenever we may, and reaching out after it. There is an ugliness which degrades words and style. So-called slang, vulgarity, obscenity, profanity, and utter frivolity are degrading one of man's greatest gifts and noblest endowments. And therefore sacred oratory ought to stand out as a thing apart, as a contribution to beauty; at least we should take as much trouble about it as we do about the adornment of our church and services. For we may be certain that a degradation of pulpit oratory is a deprivation of something which tends to elevate; whose absence people miss, and whose neglect they bitterly resent.

## III

But it is to the delivery of our message that we come at length, to delivery in its full sense, that which the Romans called *actio*. To this we come at last as the most important thing for which we must prepare in the sermon. "Rabbi, we know that Thou art a teacher come from God," said Nicodemus to our Blessed Lord.[1] What we are lies behind our message, and what we are dictates its terms and colours its words, and gives earnestness or slackness to its expression. People look for a message, as Herod obtained his message from St. John Baptist, and they get it. Is it the message out of a past life which has never yet been cleansed,

[1] St. John iii. 2.

where there is still much which needs God's forgiveness, where no cleansing coal has been laid on the lips, where there is no consciousness of a divine commission? Is it a message out of an idle present from an indifferent man to an indifferent audience? The bleating of the sheep and the lowing of the oxen are around us while we speak.[1]

Is it a message out of a hopeless future, where there is no vision, no distance, no faith?

Is it merely a message of smoke which carries no effective shot? The man has nothing to say and he says it. He knows nothing and he betrays it. He cares nothing and it is obvious.

Is it a discounted message? Our Blessed Lord Himself has told us of the prophet who has no honour in his own country.[2] Sometimes it is that the fellow-countrymen are too near to see things in their true perspective. Sometimes they know too much:

"Quis tulerit Gracchos de seditione querentes?"

The sermon, as we have seen more than once, is the experience of the life. It carries what we put into it. It penetrates where sympathy directs it. It fails where indolence robs it of its power. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.[3] If a man comes from God, he will have something to say; but its extreme value will make him careful how he says it.

[1] See 1 Sam. xv. [2] St. John iv. 44.
[3] St. Matt. xii. 34.

## CHAPTER V

### THE MESSAGE THAT FAILS—PATIENCE

"Ego dixi: in vacuum laboravi sine causâ, et vane fortitudinem meam consumpsi."

The message from God which His servants are called upon to deliver is a splendid thing, as it is revealed in vision, or built up into a burden, or entrusted to them as the Word.

As the prophet assimilates his message it imparts to him something of its own greatness. "Ye shall be named the Priests of the Lord: men shall call you the Ministers of our God."[1] To-day God's messenger is called "Reverend"; he is listened to officially, he is honoured and respected. And as we see how exactly the promised help which is proclaimed is suited to the needs of men, we think that its promise of joy and strength, its witness of salvation must make an instant appeal and be eagerly welcomed.

But, on the contrary, any faithful estimate of the ministry of preaching must not be afraid to confront the absolute certainty of failure in certain cases, of wasted energy and despised prophecy. Isaiah had

[1] Isa. lxi. 6.

to face it when entering on his ministry he heard of deaf ears, blind eyes, and gross hearts.[1] The prophets of old were stoned, the prophets of to-day are despised.

We find it hard to believe that any one can resist the cogency, the certainty, the power of our message—yet so it is, and we must expect it.

When St. Paul wrote his Epistle to the Philippians from Rome, he indicated that the Roman Church was not all that he could wish for. "All seek their own," he says, "not the things which are Jesus Christ's."[2]

One greater than St. Paul has said—He Who was the perfect Man, in Whom dwelt "all the fulness of the Godhead bodily,"[3] with Whom there was no counteracting imperfection of human taint —"I am come in My Father's Name, and ye receive Me not."[4]

Dean Church has pointed out how one after another "heroic institutions, begun in sincerity and singleness of high purpose which none can doubt, have flagged and turned aside to other things than what they thought of first."[5]

He instances St. Francis, St. Dominic, the Jesuits, the Port-Royalists, and the followers of Wesley. In our own times what failures we have to lament among the clergy, among the communicants of a parish, among members of our guilds!

[1] Isa. vi. 10. [2] Phil. ii. 21.
[3] Coloss. ii. 9. [4] St. John v. 43.
[5] Dean Church, "Cathedral and University Sermons," pp. 245, 246.

And, as the same author points out, it is especially in religion that great failures take place. "Compare what we achieve in mathematical and physical science, and by means of them, with our success in the problems of government, in dealing with the passions and ignorance of mankind, in suppressing vice and intemperance; and we see the contrast between the two great provinces of human interest and activity. It is in the most important of the two that man can least secure success, that he fails most continuously and surprisingly."[1] "The parable of the Sower," he goes on to say, "reminds us that God is not afraid to risk failure."

It is a common subject with preachers to drive home the parable of the Sower into the hearts of the careless hearers. Perhaps we should do well to consider it on the side of the Sower, as part of our examination of the ministry of the Word.

Now, the parable of the Sower shows us this sad fact, that in three cases out of four the sowing of that which in itself is good seed is unsuccessful. It is met with indifference, it is met by moral hindrance, and also by hardness and irreceptivity.

It will be well to think of these conditions carefully, for they affect our ministrations very seriously, and should, if possible, not only be recognized, but also carefully measured in the direct or indirect bearing which they have on ministerial devotion and effort.

[1] Dean Church, "Cathedral and University Sermons," pp. 251, 252.

It will be well, then, to think in this chapter of the good seed which we waste by casting it upon the wayside, swept by the flocks of predatory birds, and useless as a seed plot. In language removed from the veil of parable, we should do well to think of the energy which we seem doomed to waste on pure indifference. We fall back on ourselves again and again in despair. As we say, we cannot get our message home.

And we are conscious that we are not the only sowers who are in this difficulty. The heavy traffic of life ever increasing in intensity as it passes over the heart tends to make it harder and more impervious to all impressions.

So the novelist finds that the ordinary stock-in-trade of romance is not sufficiently *piquant*, and he betakes himself to the creation of strange and even nauseous situations, that he may attract. So the artist leaves the legitimate lines of art, and strives to arouse a lagging public by impressionism or post-impressionism, or other departures from the normal and unattractive. In music also, if people have tired of melodious harmonies they may be attracted by discords, and in many regions of art wandering votaries who have tired of beauty are to be reclaimed by ugliness.

We see the same longing for a new sensation in the toilsome and expensive holidays which are characteristic of the times. The heart of man is a fast-bound high-road; he has lost the capacity for true happiness within, he must seek it from without in ever-increasing effort.

"We who pursue
Our business with unslackening stride,
. . . . .
And see all sights from pole to pole,
And glance, and nod, and bustle by,
And never once possess our soul
Before we die." [1]

Well may moralists be anxious as to a generation which has put forth its hand to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, without God, or in His defiance. We see the young man who has been crammed with so-called useful knowledge, which he mistakes for education, who has entered on his profession without any sense of vocation, and passes through life without any conscious aim or interest. What chance has religion of penetrating below the hard surface? At the best he becomes the stolid churchgoer, at the worst the contented absentee. Or his spiritual life stagnates; he has a form of godliness which brings him to church perhaps once on Sunday, and to Holy Communion three times a year. Sermon after sermon is wasted, talk after talk leaves him unmoved. No message ever penetrates, the birds come and take it all away, and the devil seems to know his heart better than we do, and we sink back in despair.

I

Here is a case where it is all important that we should bring our difficulty before God. For what does this state of things mean to the sower? It

[1] Matthew Arnold, "A Southern Night."

means too often, despondency, such a despondency which shows itself in a desire to give up. "I am tired," says the sower, "of walking up and down, day by day, casting seed which never comes up. It is time for me to give in. I have done all I can. A younger man would have a better chance, and would be more in touch with the rising generation. I am not suited to the place. A system which moves a man on after a term of years would be far more suitable to present day needs." And so with a fair show of reason we prepare to desert our post because it is difficult, and to give up because we have failed. Should we not be much happier if we trusted God more than we do? Should we not manage our lives much better, if God's providence were a reality to us rather than a word?

Dean Church says once more: "The followers of the Cross have no right to look, in *their own* day, for the recognition of success.

> . . . "'We would every deed
> Perform at once as grandly as it shows
> After long ages . . .
> It sounds so lovely what our fathers did,
> . . . . . .
> And what we do, is, as it was to them,
> Toilsome and incomplete.'"[1]

There is always something to be done on the hardest road by the patient sower.

It is a commonplace with the shallow thinker to speak of "the idle monks"; and to compliment

[1] Dean Church, "Cathedral and University Sermons," pp. 252, 253.

them with a sneer for the excellent choice which led them to settle down in the midst of beauty and comfort, by the river-side, in the smiling valleys and fertile meadows. But let Mr. Ruskin tell us the true facts of the case.

"Those hard daisy-sprinkled or deep-furrowed fields were not laid in the sweet levels by the mountain streams; and the land which we conceive to have attracted the covetousness of the friars, lay in alternations of shingle and of marsh under shades of thicket and heath-beset rock. The sagacity which discerned and the industry which redeemed the waste alluvial soil, not of our English dells only, but of the river-sides throughout Europe, where they were pestilent with miasma, desolated by flood, and dark with forest, were found exclusively among the societies of men—the Valley Monks."

Or let us take the example of a country nurse, who is sent to tend a patient in a poor and squalid cottage. Everything is in disorder, the patient tossing in discomfort, the room fetid and untidy. In five minutes, before the doctor has been, before she knows even the nature of the case, she has tidied the room, made the patient comfortable, and made a preliminary contribution to his recovery, by setting to work on that which came before her.

There have not been wanting in recent times examples of priests whose lot has been cast among racing training stables, or in parishes inhabited chiefly by those who have separated from the Church; and who in each case setting to work on that which lay before them have produced mar-

vellous results, and made seed to grow on that which at first sight seemed to be a high-road. To be driven away by a hard surface is to fail. And the earnest worker and the servant of God ought never to allow himself to be driven out by anything.

If we cannot penetrate the hard road, it is a call to many things, but not a call to give up and go. To do so is cowardly, and moreover it does the sower a moral harm.

It is a mistake to be *driven* out of anything.

We know the man who allows himself to be driven out of "the high calling of God in Christ Jesus,"[1] which is his, by what he calls his nature, which he believes himself unable to control or resist. He does not realize the possibilities which belong even to a nature warped and biassed by passion, and he is driven away by an unworthy fear from the position which he might have held.

We know again the man who allows himself to be driven out of spiritual positions by his own weakness. Prayer is difficult to him and so he abandons it. The devotional use of the 119th Psalm is distasteful to him and he drops it before he has discovered its value and beauty. Systematic meditation requires too great an effort, and he believes himself to be incapable of it, and so is driven out of this valuable exercise by spiritual sloth.

How many a man again is driven out from aiming at the higher life, because he is the victim of scrupulosity, and believes that he is actuated by

[1] Phil. iii. 14.

motives short of the highest, and so in a mistaken pride puts up with a contented mediocrity!

A hopeless man will never do much good. The lesson which our Blessed Lord drew from the barren fig tree must never be forgotten; it was that we must have faith in God to curse barrenness, to remove withered fig trees and overcome obstacles. The greatest stagnation of life can be dealt with and must be met in the power of God.

## II

In fighting with despondency, which is so crippling to the sower, there is a danger of another kind which has to be faced. In the presence of the hard road and the marauding birds there is sometimes a reaction towards self-confidence of a wrong kind, which ends in the preacher forsaking his message for one which is easier and more popular, and in fact of setting himself up to be wiser than God.

He Who knew what was in man because He was man, left us the Catholic Church—and it is just the seeds of this which sometimes refuse to grow. And then there comes the temptation to sow something else.

Political sermons, sermons on social inequalities, sermons on subjects for the day people will listen to, and so we put the Gospel on one side and turn the pulpit into an electioneering platform, or a lecture room, or a debating room with one speaker. This is followed by short services which shall make no demand on time, popular devotions

which shall put no strain on the intellect: bright services which demand the opening of no treasures of gold, frankincense or myrrh: straight talks which require little preparation on the sower's part and less attention on the part of those who listen; until the last effort of the despairing preacher is to hand over the hard road to the volcano of a mission, where quiet spade-work has been persistently ignored, and gospel teaching has been put on one side under the first chill of listless apathy.

It is comparatively easy to grow a crop of thin grass or moss upon the road surface; to secure political voters or fan social discontent; but there is no real harvest in this.

The mistake we were making was being in a hurry, in looking for quick returns, for excitement in work, and greater ease. "My soul truly waiteth still upon God"[1] says the Psalmist. And a confidence like this must keep the preacher steady, must induce him to look to his implements of husbandry, to that which precedes the sowing, to that which is the necessary preliminary to his work in the pulpit, and without which it will certainly fail.

Holy Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Communion, Absolution, Prayer, the Bible, these are the seeds we want to sow; but controversy and ignorance and prejudice form a barrier which renders our words unfruitful. And we feel that after all the high-road swept by birds is largely the creation of the preacher's own indolence, who has done

[1] Ps. lxii. 1.

nothing to fertilize the wayside, or throw it into the area of productive soil.

III

And it is possible, alas! that the indifference symbolized by the irreceptive roadside may spread into our own lives. Failure awaiting our message is a great test of character. We have made known our vision, and it has left men cold. We have unladen our burden and no one cares to take it up. We have proclaimed our Word, and no one is afraid or rends his clothes, or is cheered and enheartened.

We experience a chill and a revulsion; perhaps at last we say, "I shall simply give my message and leave it, whether they hear or whether they forbear. It matters not, I care not. If the people refuse to hear my words, the responsibility and the loss is theirs, and I am blameless. Let them come, let them stay away, I care not."

It is well that we should ask ourselves from time to time with sincerity of heart, "What am I working for?" "Am I giving a message on which a great deal depends, or am I making a display to which I attach considerable importance? Are my sermons spoken for the love of God, or are they dictated by love of power and desire for success?" "Am I after all dependent on applause, so that I lose all heart without it? Must I ever have the magnetic influence of a crowd to elicit my message?"

A man who is despondent and has waxed in-

different through failure is apt to forget, that the success of the cause of God is one thing and his own personal success is another. He will also do well to remember that there are faults of manner on the part of the preacher, faults of temper, indolence and harshness which have all to be reckoned with.

We read of the great Sower, how "With many such parables spake He the word unto them, as they were able to hear it."[1] A sermon if it is to be a message means a great deal more than an oration, however faultlessly delivered.

And it is because men do not realize these things, because they have not the stability of the husbandman who "waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain,"[2] that they fall into moroseness, indifference to their people's welfare, formalism, dryness, and the like.

And then at last the impatient sower becomes an absentee curate. He wastes his precious hours in games, or other forms of strenuous idleness, and writes to the newspapers to complain that the Church has lost her hold on the poor, and to discuss new methods of attractiveness which are to soften even the wayside.

Indifference is a subtle poison which may very easily spread into the heart of the despondent sower.

He has ceased to watch, he has left his post, the opportunity comes, and he is not ready.

[1] St. Mark iv. 33. [2] St. James v. 7.

The smallest and most unpromising place may suddenly be magnified into importance. Mr. Keble from his small village continued to exercise an influence on religious thought which those in higher places failed to emulate. At any moment in the quietest place the tide of battle may be gathered to a head, and the honour of the Church depend on the faithfulness of the unknown champion whom God has placed there.

It is not the work which makes the workman, but the workman who finds and makes the work.

"First give thyself wholly to God, and then to the work which God gives thee to do."

When Elijah fled from his post into the wilderness, God showed him His own methods, that His way was not in the wind, nor in the earthquake, nor in the fire, but in the still small voice. It has been so always. Such things as the abolition of slavery, the reprobation of wars of greed, the recognition of the true position of women, have been the result of the gradual growth of influence. Every parish priest has in the children the parish of the future which he can form with his own hands. If the hearts of his young people turn into the hard wayside surface it is largely his own fault.

All the great questions of the day come before him in miniature; foreign missions, in his parochial society; education in his parish schools; Church doctrine and theology in the various and interesting cases which he has to treat in his public and private ministrations.

"Go, return," said the Lord to Elijah, "on thy

way to the wilderness of Damascus":[1] anoint Gentile and Hebrew as king and prophet. The history of the next generation of Israel is in your hands.

Failure is a subject from which we fain would turn, but we dare not.

I may be deserted because I am true. I may be deserted because I am obstinate. Is it my own fault? It is a hard thing to scatter seed which is for ever falling on a high-road. But somebody must take up this work, and I am set to do it.

The rain of God can make even the desert to blossom as a rose; but I must be in my place when the hour of God has come.

Despondency never helped any man. "Despondency," it has been said, "is but another form of self-conceit. Despondency is self-confidence which has failed."

[1] 1 Kings xix. 15.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE MESSAGE THAT FAILS—COURAGE

"Sic erit verbum Meum, quod egredietur de ore Meo. Non revertetur ad Me vacuum, sed faciet quæcunque volui, et prosperabitur in his ad quæ misi illud."

THERE is something worse than an empty church and a wasted message, and that is a full church and an empty Church life.

The crop produced by years of diligent sowing is often disheartening enough, and one of the chief arguments against Church schools is the failure to produce the life based on Church principles.

So our Blessed Lord in His parable prepares us for shallowness. The sower may expect to find a *substratum* of rock or stone underneath the soil of so much promise, which develops out of the hearers of sermons a class of men whom He calls προσκαιροὶ, men who have no root in themselves, and endure but for a while, and in time of temptation fall away.

These are the men who appear from time to time in parochial statistics, and in a general counting of heads which belongs to a religious census. They figure sometimes as Confirmation candidates,

or perhaps even as communicants, and sing solos in "services for men."

A good deal might be said on their side as to the causes, dangers, and evils of shallowness.

But it will not be amiss to look at it on the side of the sower, who has to face the disappointment of withered hopes and wasted instruction.

It is told of Rowland Hill that once when walking with a friend, he encountered a man in the last stage of filthy intoxication, and said, "There goes one of my converts." "How so?" said his friend. "Can that drunkard be one of your converts?" "Yes," said Rowland Hill, "he is one of my converts, but not one of God's."

The preacher must be prepared to meet a certain amount of this failure in response, and of unfruitfulness in his most promising seed. Let any parish priest take his list of Confirmation candidates, whom he has carefully instructed, and trace their subsequent career as Churchmen, and it will be wonderful indeed if he does not find instances of arrested growth and conspicuous failure.

People talk of the mercurial temperament which characterizes especially certain races. Shallow teaching and ignorant sowing are also to be blamed. Even human restlessness and instability contribute to the result. But the fact remains of withered hopes and conspicuous failures. The sower thought that he had escaped the high-road; he finds himself after all with the same high-road at a lower level, producing a failure which at one time simulated success.

## I

The late Dr. King, Bishop of Lincoln, was fond of pointing out that the call of St. Andrew to the apostleship was the result of a repeated effort.

St. John the Baptist proclaimed his message as he saw our Blessed Lord approaching him, "Behold the Lamb of God, Which taketh away the sin of the world." And there is no record of any success following on his message. But "again the next day after," the same testimony is delivered, and St. Andrew was one of those who heard and followed Jesus, and so became the pioneer of the apostolic band which was afterwards gathered.[1]

And in like manner he who would sow for Christ must not hesitate to make, if necessary, a repeated effort.

The word which we speak may be caught up, published and praised, and then, as far as the results go, prove an utter disappointment. We must not be disheartened at seeing the failure of a whole crop of promising statistics. If we thus lose heart, we shall speedily become an idle and unprofitable servant. Certainly it tries a man's worth and puts him on his mettle, that he should be called upon to rally a failing cause, retrieve a failure, or repeat an effort.

God in His holy Word again and again reminds us of the need of such virtues as perseverance, patience, endurance, and looking to the end.

[1] St. John 29 and foll.

He tells us that even when we approach Him in prayer, we must be like an importunate widow dealing with an unjust judge.[1]

If we look at what is known as the Oxford Movement of the last century, which has transformed, directly or indirectly, the whole aspect of the Church of England, and has even influenced bodies which are outside it, what was it but a repeated effort on a large scale by those who had faith to believe that Catholicism, that is, the undiluted Gospel Message, had innate powers of revival?

The leaders of that movement dug again the wells which the Philistines had stopped up, and called them by the names which their fathers had called them.[2] They opened up the well of the Eucharistic life which lay covered over and neglected in the Prayer-book, and once more they might have called it Esek, or Contention. They discovered once more the well of Sacramental Confession, a clear and unmistakable means of grace provided by the Church for her children, and once more they might have named this Sitnah, or Hatred, in the strife and bitterness stirred up in connection with it. And in the well of Divine worship which had well-nigh been forgotten they discovered a need of human nature which sooner or later was bound to assert itself, and after much misrepresentation and confusion and ritual troubles; this is called Rehoboth, or "Room" and toleration as among those who have agreed to lay aside unworthy suspicion.

[1] St. Luke xviii. 1 and foll. [2] Gen. xxvi. 18 and foll.

It is wonderful to see the power of vitality which lingers on in the Word of God even where at first sight there seems only disappointment and failure.

The Divine scheme has never really failed where men have been faithful to it. It is still "the power of God unto salvation"[1] where it is sown in European countries, where it is scattered in heathen lands. In tropical Africa, in educated England, we know nothing of a simpler gospel to meet more elementary conditions of civilization, or more complex conditions of society. The faithful sower, in spite of all disappointments, is still able to say, "Thy Word is tried to the uttermost: and Thy servant loveth it."[2]

In dealing with an erring brother we must be prepared to go beyond seven times unto seventy times seven.[3] In dealing with ourselves we must remember the awful possibility of falling seven times in a day,[4] and not despair. It is in human nature to give in after the first failure, and to grudge any fresh expenditure of costly effort in the hope of retrieving our buried enterprise.

It is told of a priest whose successful efforts and vigorous labours were being praised before his Bishop, that the only comment made was this question, "Who has opposed him?" Good seed is sown in the face of many hindrances, and the better it is the greater will be the effort to destroy it, on the side of the many opposing influences

[1] Rom. i. 16.
[2] Ps. cxix. 140.
[3] St. Matt. xviii. 22.
[4] St. Luke xvii. 4.

which surround the sower. Pre-eminently, therefore, the sower will need the powerful influence of hope.

History has its message to deliver to us. Even in the early days of fervour and enthusiasm, when our Blessed Lord's visible presence had only lately been withdrawn from the earth, the Apostles began to see the failure of converts, and the rise of those who would straiten where God had not straitened, and relax where God had not relaxed. St. John looked out upon nascent heresy, and St. Paul laments the appearance of "another gospel." Look again at the history of Donatism, the result of the new learning, the fantastic schemes of religion which surrounded the Reformation, many of them dictated on the ground that the Word of God had lost its virtue.

We also need to get rid of the spirit of pessimism, which sends a man to his work believing in his heart that he is only casting seed which is destined to wither on a stone which never can be softened.

But, on the other hand, if a man will but look for it, there is much to encourage him, if he has but faith to repeat the old message, "Behold the Lamb of God." The power of the sacramental system will not fail him; the devout life has lost none of its beauty nor its power. Strictness and discipline will still avail to keep the heart soft and receptive of the Divine message.

Failure, or apparent failure, is a call to many things. It is a call to penitence, humiliation,

sorrow, shame, and submission; but it is also a call to fresh enterprise. There is yet balm in Gilead, there is still a physician there, the health of the daughter of God's people may still be recovered[1] by a repeated effort.

And as it is with the Church's effort on a large scale, so it is in the sower's dealing with the individual soul. His message and warning are not the only help and exhortation which strive to make themselves heard within the region of the man's conscience. God with His following grace, the guardian angel with his present protection,—these at least have not given him up nor ceased to strive. The prodigal son among the parables; the penitent thief among the miracles of grace; St. Mark restored and profitable; the robber found again by St. John,—are all instances of virtue once lost and again recovered; of seed which once seemed sterilized by a stone, but recovering again with a deeper and stronger root.

## II

To the preacher who is willing to repeat his effort, the system of the Church's year comes with wonderful helpfulness. The recurring Sunday, the round of fast and festival, all give fresh opportunities of fresh sowing under fresh conditions. Who is there among ardent sowers who does not look forward to Lent and Advent as charged with possibility of recovery to many who seemed to be lost?

[1] Jer. viii. 22.

Christmas, with its message of dignity to the body; Good Friday, with its promise of pardon; Easter, with its call to consider immortality; Ascension with its Sursum Corda; Whit Sunday, with its assurance of sanctifying grace,—all give fresh opportunities of bringing home great truths, and of fertilizing the ground which has failed in its promise. Surely we mean more than a protest which is the outcome of an unprogressive conservatism, when we refuse to substitute a calendar of modern empiricism for the well-proved calendar by which the Church keeps effectual and alive the things which really matter and are essential to the development or the renewal of the Christian life.

The practical sower will refuse to part with a system which is of such great importance to his work. The Church by her different days of obligation puts as it were the great facts of our Redemption under the powerful lens of a microscope. And as he who would use that scientific instrument to a useful purpose knows that he must carefully break up that which has to be examined into minute portions, otherwise all would be confused and indistinct; so the Church, knowing how impossible it is for any one mind to grasp at one view such vast doctrines as those of the Incarnation, the Atonement, the Resurrection, the work and office of the Holy Spirit, takes them as it were to pieces in her Christian year, separates them for the sake of contemplation into manageable groups, where she can pray over them, praise God in their inspiration, read the Scriptures in the light of

them, and this sometimes for a week or a month together, and ever find fresh points of interest and enterprise, and recovery.

We are menaced with a serious danger in the political sermon, as we see in the complaints which reach us from the Nonconformist bodies. Political questions are no doubt of immense importance, but to attempt to sow party politics is as if the sower were to plant loaves of bread in the ground. His duty is to plant good Gospel seed which will inevitably ripen into the true political spirit, that is, the spirit which will work out the good of the community, not the mere party questions of the moment which he mistakes for fundamental principles. "Make the tree good, and his fruit good."[1] A good man will be a good citizen by an inevitable compulsion. He can learn political questions from the newspapers. He will learn to be a good citizen by becoming a good man. The sower and the prophet exercise two distinct functions. It is a sorry thing to be so intent on weeding as never to sow.

The Church, once more, in giving these opportunities for fresh beginnings and new sowings, is but imitating the methods of God.

God by His own disposition of day and night, summer and winter, seed-time and harvest, relieves us from the monotony of an unbroken existence, and so gives starting-points for fresh beginnings.

In His own revealed system of religious observance to the Jews, their year was broken up, and their

[1] St. Matt. xii. 33.

very domestic life was invaded, by the obligation to remember, three times a year, the facts of God's providential dealing with them.

In following God's leading hand, we shall best do something to arrest the tendency to failure which is incident to all human work.

We are told that the causes of failure are "tribulation or persecution because of the Word."[1] But surely there is much to encourage us in the signs of the times. There is a love of the Church, a devout use of the altar, a care for God's service, a veneration for the sacred feasts, which are all cheering. Let the Church see to it that she tempts for good, with a persistency which will become a counteracting force against that which tempts for evil. The attraction of the Lord will countervail the tribulation inflicted by a mocking world.

## III

Neither must the sower forget that he too needs a repeated effort as regards himself.

If Holy Baptism put us into a state of salvation, if we are to keep ourselves ready and fit for our task, we must be ready to work together with God in thus making ourselves His worthy agents. "Whosoever will be saved: before all things it is necessary" that he keep what he has received.

There are graduated temptations in life. Childhood has its own; youth is tempted by its very vigour; old age by its self-introspection; the

[1] St. Matt. xiii. 21.

very hour of death has its peculiar temptations. So it is with the priesthood, with the prophet whom God has chosen to warn, and the teacher whom He has instructed to sow.

In many cases the sower gives way to despair in his ministrations, because he too has no root in himself.

Again and again he will have to make the renewed effort which he first made at his Ordination. "Tribulation or persecution because of the Word," is damping his enthusiasm; he sows without heart, under a sense of criticism, only half believing what he says, and with little hope of results. He is wearied with the effort, and distrusts his own methods, and with him the Word goes forth void.

Or, to go deeper still, he has not made the renewed effort to overcome the besetting sin; the fault of life or temper which he knows vitiates his work, and spoils his chance of sowing. How many seem to have given up hope for themselves, while mechanically they sow the seed which they personally know has no chance of growing in the present condition of their own heart! It is with a sense of unreality that they pretend to expect from others a crop, which they know from their own inward experience will not thrive upon a stone.

Neither is this renewed effort entirely in the way of reparation and restoration. "Growing in grace" means a progressive holiness—a growth it may be in inverse ratio to the decay of our natural powers. "Though our outward man perish, yet

the inward man is renewed day by day."[1] The sower, if any one, must be one of those who brings forth more fruit in his age.[2] And so he will find that now, when the walls of Jerusalem have been repaired, and the breaches thereof closed, when God has given him rest from his enemies,—that there is a great work to be done in the rearing up of the temple within the sacred enclosure.

There is always a danger of forgetting that Christianity is something more than a higher system of morality, and of ceasing to aim at perfection of life. Those of us who are called upon to direct consciences, know how frequently confessions exhibit only a monotony of mediocrity, and the real danger there is lest certain deficiencies should take their place as recognized infirmities and as failings which are inevitable.

In some sense it is harder to attain to the excellence of a perfect Christian life, than it is to master the turbulent onslaught of wild passion. Steadiness, respectability, a sound morality have taken the place of Christian excellence to such an extent in the heart of our hearers, that we, the sowers of the word, think that we need no more than higher exhibitions of the same mediocrity.

And yet we know that the appeal which Christ makes to us is to be perfect; He Himself stands out before us in history as the perfect Man. Giotto was right when he exhibited as the highest specimen of his art, the perfect ○, drawn with an unfaltering hand.

[1] 2 Cor. iv. 16. [2] Ps. xcii. 13.

Perhaps perfection in the ordinary life and everyday routine appeals more to the average man than do the noble acts of occasional excellence. One who is good-natured in circumstances of great irritation; one who can repress self when there is every reason for magnifying it; one who is unselfish when all are seeking their own; one who obviously finds God in his devotions, and commends prayer by a spiritual mastery;—these exhibit the transforming power of Christianity, the real beauty of the Spirit, and the virtues which merit the beatitudes.

The fact remains, that the preacher too often has caused the stones to fall which become worked into the receptive soil, in something which he has said, or in something which he has done, or in something which he is. His character does not attract; he does not tempt to good; he lets fall hard and stony sayings, which he thought were displaying his own cleverness, and have produced only scepticism.

The clever critic, the negative teacher, has much to answer for in the stony ground which has accumulated doubts which it cannot answer, and a general distrust of all the subjects of teaching, as proving, or likely to prove, to be cunningly devised fables.

God forbid that the teacher should be an Achan, whose buried sin hinders the progress of God's Word!

God forbid that idleness and carelessness which sow only seed which has lost all vital germs, should vitiate the sowing from the beginning!

Let us take courage. Bishop Paget has spoken of "the miracles of repair"—of the power of recovery which we find in the human body.[1]

So it is with the soul. "The Creator's will" is "for the recovery of all lost perfection."

"I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God."[2]

There is a wonderful power of recovery which we must work for, and work with, in ourselves and in others. And "in due season we shall reap, if we faint not."[3]

[1] Dr. Paget, "Faculties and Difficulties for Belief and Disbelief."
[2] Ezek. xviii. 32. [3] Gal. vi. 9.

## CHAPTER VII

THE MESSAGE THAT FAILS—PROFESSIONAL SKILL

"Et misit Dominus manum suam et tetigit os meum, et dixit Dominus ad me: ecce dedi verba mea in ore tuo. Ecce constitui te hodie super gentes et super regna, ut evellas et destruas et disperdas et dissipes, et ædifices et plantes."

The failure in the message suggests great patience in dealing with the indifferent, and great courage in dealing with failures, but our Blessed Lord tells us that the sower of good seed will also have to contend with hidden thorns. It is a sad fact that a great number of our hearers come to church and ask to receive advice with unweeded hearts.

It would be well if this fact were more realized. Organization is excellent; committees reduce to manageable proportions the many interests which need attention; sanitation and better housing all tend to the general amelioration, body and soul, of the people committed to us; we may legitimately consult for the healthy amusement of those who otherwise might fall into evil ways; but all these things will be useless, and tend to set up a fool's paradise, if we are ever tempted to forget the constant need which exists of a personal dealing with sin.

If a doctor spent all his time in organizing meetings and concerts his patients would die; if a lawyer occupied himself in liturgical pursuits and studies, his own professional excellence would leave him. There is a great and increasing danger of God's ministers ceasing to attend to their own business.

Our people too often have unweeded hearts, and they know it; they cut off the tops of the weeds as they appear above the ground, but they do not know how to get rid of the hidden roots, which, in spite of all their efforts, will persist in pushing up their green silken tendrils, which, like the wild convolvulus in the garden, will choke and kill that which it binds in its beautiful but deadly embrace.

The needs of those whom we recognize as good people are very great, and while the sower betakes himself to the last controversial refuge, in which to shelter his inaction, while he says Confession is a medicine and not a food, he forgets that in fever-stricken districts quinine has become part of a daily prophylactic as well as a medicine for those who have been stricken down. In an unhealthy world it may be that medicine is but another kind of food.

## I

It is well that the sower should at once make up his mind to the fact that one of the chief obstacles which his work will have to contend with is sin.

And this not sin in the abstract, which dwells inside a pale, well defined and easily isolated, but sin which pushes hidden roots under soil which seems most promising, and where it might easily be supposed to be unable to find any harbour.

And as it begins to show itself with its green foliage and bright flowers, it sometimes is hardly regarded as sin at all. It is dressed up in fine names, and is confidently supposed to be bound up in human nature. Such root sins, for instance, as worldliness, luxury, and selfishness are little regarded, and by no means feared. And yet they take up much room and have sharp thorns.

And yet there is everything to warn us against the deadly and destructive agency, which, under the name of sin, is the foe to all Christian growth. The structure of the Church presupposes throughout an attitude of defence against a very real danger. The Sacraments varying from Holy Baptism and Holy Communion to the most ordinary dealings with a man's inner life are constructed as a barrier against a very subtle foe. "A death unto sin," so speaks the Font. The precious Blood of atonement for sin, so answers the Altar. Confirmation speaks of a need of bracing under a severe trial. Absolution tells of the need of recovery from disabling falls. The clergy in our midst are as the ambulance corps and the hospital train in the advancing army.

We are equally impressed as to the deadly nature of sin if we examine the inner consciousness of the world as expressed in its literature and history.

The doctrine of Nemesis following on even undetected misdeeds speaks of the impossibility of escape from the evil results of wrong committed. The dread goddesses the Eumenides pursue, as we have seen, the offender who cannot elude them. The revealed Word of God in the Holy Scriptures shows us again and again, in familiar examples, not only the sure punishment of sin, but exhibits punishment minutely following and curiously taking the shape of the offence which it seeks to punish; "that they might know, that wherewithal a man sinneth by the same also shall he be punished."[1]

Aristotle, "the master of them that know" (*il maestro di color che sanno*),[2] speaks of man as beyond all living things undisciplined and depraved. Ovid, the Latin poet, speaking of himself, utters the wail of baffled aspirations under the influence of evil desire—

"*Video meliora proboque, deteriora sequor.*"[3]

in words which curiously remind us of language used by St. Paul.

The testimony of mankind, as appearing in words, is equally significant. There lies crystallized in the common vocabulary of mankind a record of a similar experience.

Sin is a missing of the mark of life, ἁμαρτία. It is a παράβασις, a passing over the line of trespass into a forbidden territory. It is ἀδικία, an act of unrighteousness destroying the integrity of the law

[1] Wisdom xi. 16. [2] Dante, "Inf." iv. 131.
[3] Ovid, "Met." vii. 20; cf. Rom. vii. 15.

of right and wrong. It is an offence, a blow or stumbling-block; it is wickedness, the terrible fascination, as it were, of witchcraft. It is a fault or flaw in the soundness of character, or, as St. John tells us, it is lawlessness.[1] So that we are prepared to agree, in view of this wide testimony, with the statement that is made, sin is unnatural, and ought not to be where it is.[2]

> "Wounds of the soul though healed will ache,
> The reddening scars remain and make
> Confession.
> Lost innocence returns no more,
> We are not what we were before
> Transgression."

## II

The sower, in the inevitable disappointments which await him from this source, will find that he has to contend with more than the usual depravity which he has learned to associate with fallen humanity. He will find that a cultivation of weeds, thorns, and thistles is going on as being picturesque accessories to the general aspect of life.

He may preach their extirpation with all earnestness and vigour, but he will find that public opinion of a certain kind expressed in books and newspapers is planting them, or at least opposing their destruction.

He will find that one or more of these theories

[1] 1 St. John iii. 4.

[2] Bishop Gore, "Christian Doctrine of Sin," Appendix to "Lux Mundi," p. 528.

is being circulated in their defence. In the first place, to attempt to eradicate thorns is to attempt the impossible. They must of necessity exist where they are. The spirit of man is linked with the animal, and it must of necessity take some time to throw the animal off. Having a body, as we have, its desires must be gratified, and that without sin in their gratification.

But to say this is to forget a great truth that sin lies not in things, but in our relation to things. When we speak of the sinful desires of the flesh, we are not speaking of those desires simply, but of the way in which those desires can be used for wrong purposes. The possession of those desires is inevitable, for it is incident to human nature, but the use of them for wrong purposes is by no means a necessity.

The murderer and the soldier both take human life, but they are judged in accordance with the relation in which they stand to the taking of life. In the one it is a crime, in the other it is a meritorious action. The one is punished, and the other is rewarded—the one because he uses his power of destruction in the wrong way, the other because he exercises it for the common good.

In the same way, adultery and holy marriage are both concerned with the same earthly affection. The one is a deadly sin, the other is a sacrament, signifying the mystical union which is between Christ and His Church.[1] We shall see this the

[1] See Bishop Gore, "Christian Doctrine of Sin," Appendix to "Lux Mundi," p. 527.

more clearly if we consider Christ's attitude to the body. Christ, in His words, His actions, and in His provisions for our sanctification, has no quarrel with the body, but only with the flesh, that is, with the body as employed for wrong ends. He, in His glorious incarnation, took upon Himself a human body, in all points like ours. His Apostle has told us how we may glorify God in our body.[1] And to those who follow Him, the body may become a helpful friend, and no longer "the nearest camp to the enemy."

From the assertion that sin is a necessary accompaniment to human nature, it is only a step on to say—it is, indeed, bound up with the assertion itself—that no man is responsible for sin, that there is no remedy for a bad character, there is no substitute for a good one. Heredity and environment are, no doubt, very potent influences which bear upon human nature, but the whole testimony of experience, and man's inmost consciousness, call out that he is free—absolutely free. Hereditary tendencies have been controlled, and can be mastered, however strong they may be; and environment may colour, but it need never poison the stream of life. History will supply instances, which the experience of most men will corroborate, of the weak points in a man's character becoming his strong points, and of a strong life being built up upon that which at one time seemed to be a crumbling and dangerous ruin.

It is only a step further to say that sin, besides

[1] 1 Cor. vi. 20.

being inevitable and involving no guilt, is a positive good.

We shall find this again and again either expressed or assumed in the ordinary moral estimates of the day.

Sin so called is an experience; the tasting of the tree of knowledge of good and evil opens a man's eyes; it makes him wise, it makes him godlike, in that it enlarges his ideas, and makes him a man of the world instead of a vegetating recluse. No one is the worse for having had "a past." Above all things, anything like "a clerical mind" is to be avoided. A little flavour of the ways of common life is good for any one.

And yet there is a sterner and a graver experience behind all this. We may grant that a man, if it be God's will, is none the worse for being tempted; it braces him and makes him helpful to others who are being buffeted. But sin, which is absolutely distinct from temptation, can never be anything else than a real harm. Innocency, perfect innocency, rare as it is, stands absolutely by itself in its incomparable grandeur and commanding excellence. Nothing will ever make up for the loss of it, nothing will ever command the same homage from humanity.[1] Penitence is very beautiful, but it is not innocence; and there is some ignorance which is more powerful than knowledge. "Knowledge of wickedness is not wisdom, neither at any time the counsel of sinners prudence."[2]

[1] See Dr. Illingworth's sermon, "Innocence: University and Cathedral Sermons."

[2] Ecclus. xix. 22.

Sin is a dread reality, which carries with it nothing but the fruit of death, for it is that which, in thought, word, or deed, is opposed to the Divine law.

The common experience of life is in startling opposition to the principles which seek to ignore or glorify sin. We are face to face with failure. We have been pursuing a system of education, so called, which would fain banish God and religion altogether, and which has succeeded in undermining to a great extent religious influences. And can any one pretend to be satisfied with the product of the national school, or with the result of lectures, clubs, and libraries as a substitute for religion?

The habitual conversation common among those who are not the lowest stratum of society; the obscene literature, and the demand for it; the writing on the wall; the decay of modesty; and the terrible phenomenon of child immorality—all exhibit a barely hidden crop of damaging sin. There are thorns dreadful and deadly to be found in the quietest places. And the sower must be sure of this, that his seed cannot live unless something is done to weed the heart of the hearers.

## III

But how is this to be done? This is a vital question; for so much good seed is wasted by reason of the neglect of preliminary preparation,

on the part of the sower, of that soil which he has to cultivate.

It is indeed a question whether simple preaching by itself effects much permanent good. The sower must also be a cultivator; the preacher must secure a receptive soil.

To do this means hard work, individual work, brave work, and moral courage.

The preacher must look well to his rhetoric, lest it be but so much smoke and flash which carries no striking force. It is a noticeable fact that the point in which so many sermons fail is in their application. They are essays to satisfy the sense of scholarship in the composer; they are not messages to touch the heart of the receiver. The preacher must never rest until he has acquired the power of making penitents, of arousing a desire in his hearers of themselves weeding and cleansing their own hearts. If he be the parish priest, he will certainly, at least once a year, speak quite plainly about the deadly sins which work so much havoc in the heart. The Bible speaks quite openly, he must with care and thoughtfulness do the same.

Then there is the individual dealing with inquirers, from which he may not shrink. It may be that thus for the first time he begins to understand how little he has grasped human ignorance or touched human needs. He will need all the sympathy of a tender heart; he will need all the insight of one who has studied spiritual needs; he will need all gentleness not to quench the smoking

flax or break the bruised reed. And to this end he will always be accessible and ready to meet those who seem only to take up his time or interrupt the ordered course of his business day. Nicodemus will come by night at inconvenient times because he will not face publicity. It may well be doubted whether a great orator and learned divine should waste his time over a runaway slave like Onesimus. One of the things that he will have to learn speedily is this, that men are not sinners always because they wish to be, and that the most unlikely people, as they seemed, yet need a physician, and that God may have stored with him the anodyne for this man's pain, the healing medicine for that man's wound.

Then, of course, there is the Church's own method of weeding the soul, known as the ministry of Confession and Absolution, which we may be called upon to apply, and from which no priest may shrink. But the healing virtue of the precious Blood may not be mechanically applied. No doubt there may be a danger of creating, by unskilful treatment, that dangerous perversion, the mechanical penitent. Confession itself, in unskilful hands and by thoughtless use, may become a means of enabling a person to sin without compunction or alarm, as one who does not fear to fall because he has an antidote.

Is there not a need that we should study, not the controversial literature which deals with an unpopular and misunderstood subject, but rather the practical bearing of this ministry, which any

master of the spiritual life will tell us is absolutely invaluable in the conflict with sin?

Like a doctor, the preacher too must have an interest in and study individual cases. Without it, his sermons and his seed-sowing will be of little practical avail.

## IV

And all this may apply with a tenfold emphasis to ourselves. Our ministerial ἀρέτη, our power of sowing, may be choked by thorns and weeds which are growing apace.

Those who are familiar with country districts will often have noticed the private garden of the farmer. His fields are well planted, well scoured, well tended, but his own garden is neglected, weed-grown, and flowerless. He has no time, he will tell you, to attend to it, and no spare labour which he can divert to it.

But no such excuse can hold good with the sower of God's spiritual seed in the fields of His Church. "Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself?"[1] His, at all events, is a model garden, whose fruitfulness and excellence must commend both the seed and methods of sowing. Even the chance passer-by must be arrested by the fertility and rows of colour and beauty, which must serve as an attraction to him to pursue the same methods, and receive the same seed.

There is temptation enough, indeed, to neglect

[1] Rom. ii. 21.

ourselves, to discount by our own unfruitfulness and thorn-grown life, the appeal to others to receive meekly the implanted word which is able to save their souls.[1]

The weeds grow apace because we have so long neglected them. There are the weeds which were dropped into the receptive soil by a passing bird which crossed over our life at school. The thistle-down of laxity has blown into our lives from the world outside us, as we were led astray by some blast of vain doctrine or vain principle of a godless age. The old growth has gone on seeding itself; it has never really been pulled up by the roots. School days seeded themselves into the growth of college life, and college life has developed into a weed of evil habit, which we have begun now to believe is indigenous, at the best to be kept under, with no hope of complete eradication.

It may be that ἁμαρτία has a terrible significance to us; we have missed the high aim with which we started, and are settling down into popular preachers, or political agitators, or mere clever essayists, able to use a pulpit which is at once the coward's castle and the vantage-ground of a privileged speaker. It may be that we are conscious to ourselves of the fault which makes our utterances ring hollow and robs them of sincerity. There is all the difference in the world between preaching ourselves and preaching Christ Jesus the Lord,[2] between preaching, unconsciously it may be, for the success of our own opinion, and speaking as

[1] St. James i. 21, A.V. [2] 2 Cor. iv. 5.

one constrained by a message on behalf of an ideal whose realization he longs and prays for.

Daily and hourly must the preacher feel the truth of the heart-broken prayer, "O Lord, make me what I might have been had I never sinned!" Out of an overgrown, uncultivated, stifled heart, we can only say—

"They made me keeper of the vineyards, but mine own vineyard have I not kept."[1]

[1] 2 Cant. i. 6.

# CHAPTER VIII

## MINISTRY TO THE SAINTS

"Omnem palmitem in Me non ferentem fructum, tollit eum; et omnem qui fert fructum, purgabit eum, ut fructum plus afferat."

Our Blessed Lord's parable of the Sower has led us to expect failure in spite of effort. We shall need all our patience when we seem day by day to be wasting our good seed on an irreceptive high-road. We shall need the power of making a renewed effort in dealing with precocious failure. And weeding out the hindrances which can only choke the good seed needs sternness and resolution.

But we are also allowed to learn that the soil is by no means all of it unproductive or stubborn. If there are three bad conditions, there is certainly one good. And this is a fact which we must lay hold of in times of failure and depression. We must be careful to avoid a tendency to hasty generalizations, such as that which leads us to complain of "the low level of stolid indifference in the country," or "the abundant vice and frivolity of our large towns."

So, of old, "publicans and sinners" were lumped together, although a Levi and a Zacchæus were to

be found in their ranks; "Samaritan" and "devil" went together as terms of reproach, and yet our Blessed Lord in His parable speaks of a good Samaritan. And the thankful leper proved to be of this race, and a woman steeped in sin showed that she too and her fellow-countrymen, although Samaritans and sinners, were yet capable of becoming saints and believers.

Nazareth was condemned by an epigram, and yet it was the city of the Blessed Virgin and the home of our Blessed Lord. Mr. Baring Gould has spoken of the flowers which can be found almost everywhere, even in the most unlikely places of the globe. And so there have been saints everywhere; saints in the most unlooked-for places, and in the most impossible surroundings, as, for example, in Cæsar's household, from whom St. Paul sends an especial message to the Philippians.[1]

The ranks of the early Christian community were filled with many drawn from low and unpromising conditions. "You see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called."[2]

Onesimus, who was indirectly the pioneer of slave emancipation, was himself a runaway and perhaps fraudulent slave.

The first soul to enter Paradise among the redeemed was a thief. There are treasures hid away in the quietest places. A small country place may be sheltering a Joan of Arc, as a masterpiece may sometimes be found buried in a garret.

[1] Phil. iv. 22. [2] 1 Cor. i. 26.

We must not take a gloomy pleasure in thinking that all is wrong, and all doomed to failure. To do so were to imitate the scrupulous who destroy Christian joy and Christian progress by a morbid delight in thinking that everything that they do is wrong.

No, there is good soil as well as bad, and the sower will find that here, too, he has distinct duties towards it.

## I

We who are called upon to deliver God's message are apt to forget that we have duties to the saints under our care as well as to the sinners. We preach stern sermons, that we may warn the unruly. We hope by a display of learning to convince the modern mind that we are not afraid of questions of the day. But we forget that we have a distinct function in building up and maturing those who are waiting to be helped in the spiritual life. We must soften, if we can, the hard road; we must cut away the rocky sub-soil; we must root out the thorns; but we shall still find that the good soil needs looking to, carefully watching, weeding, and tending, if it is to bring forth fruit to perfection. There must be no shrinking from this.

Gabriel the mighty archangel is sent to Blessed Mary as a harbinger of the Incarnation. God uses a messenger, albeit a spiritual one, in such a momentous visit as this; and God may use us too, imperfect messengers as we are, to speak the

good news, to point the way, to develop vocation, to utter the word which is to guide and direct the saint, and so spiritually instruct those who are our superiors. And in view of this possibility the sower must wrestle with spiritual sloth. There is a theology of the heart, there is a spiritual instinct and refinement, all which can be gained by diligent prayer, meditation on the Holy Scriptures, and careful study of the ways of God.

St. John Baptist, in his round of teaching, may still find that besides the Pharisee, the publican, and the soldier, a Being of spotless purity may claim ministrations at his hands.

In vain is it for him to say, "I have need to be baptized of Thee, and comest Thou to me?"[1] Sad it is, no doubt, if the personal incapacity overshadows the ministerial power; but there can be no shrinking without a betrayal of duty. Ananias is ordered to receive Saul, and, as it were, to nurse his conversion.[2] This unknown disciple is no unimportant factor in the life-history of the great Apostle of the Gentiles.

There may be a very real danger to the sower of losing conversions and hindering vocations, because he is possessed with a fear born of indolence, or a self-mistrust born of pride, which have combined to make him inefficient.

[1] St. Matt. iii. 14.
[2] Acts ix. 10–16.

## II

Good people, we must remember, have their faults. If some bring forth a hundredfold, some bring forth sixtyfold, and some thirty.

It would be easy to run off at once a list of the obvious faults incident to goodness which need resolute treatment and constant attention.

There is prejudice, which finds it difficult to acknowledge that a Samaritan can be merciful. There is bitterness, which forbids all casting out of devils in those who follow not with us, and is always on the look-out to call down fire from heaven. There is narrowness, which refuses to recognize any call to work among the Gentiles, which despises missionary work, or indeed anything except a narrow parochialism.

Scrupulosity, again, is a blight which hangs over the actions of good people, which robs them more and more of holy joy, and at last leads them to feel a positive unhappiness unless they can detect some colourable sin in the day's work.

And yet if there is a tendency for the sower to neglect the missionary side of his work, there is also a tendency in him to neglect, as it were, those who should be the Sixth Form among his scholars—the communicants, for instance, or certain devout souls, whom God has put in his care, which he must on no account neglect to teach, and to whose needs he must minister, as a good steward of the manifold grace of God.

A glance at the parable may help us in the

methods of guidance and teaching which should be adopted in view of the process of the growth in goodness which is thus exhibited to us. St. Luke[1] tells us how the receptive hearers are those of a καρδία καλὴ καὶ ἀγάθη ("an honest and good heart") and the classical combination of these two words occurs to us as representing perhaps the nearest approach in old times to the designation of what we mean by a gentleman. It may be that these two words, as placed here, have no connection with their classical use, but at the same time the idea may well be a suggestive one.

It may be that these are the gentle hearts among those to whom we minister, they who are, or, who have the making of, the true *Gentiles*, the good specimens of the race,[2] superior natures as it were, who will most readily respond to cultivation.

If this be so, we shall find that in dealing with these we shall need that fruit of the Spirit which is known as χρηστότης, or kindness of heart, which displays itself in kindness of action and refinement of manner.

A good deal of the flippancy and even roughness which we hear in sermons, or the jocular familiarity which is supposed to attract, may repel and chill back our best people. True, they can be trying, exacting, and difficult; true, we may need to exercise great firmness and tact in dealing with these gentle natures; but at least we may try to understand them, try to supply their legitimate

[1] St. Luke viii. 15.

[2] See author's "Fruit of the Spirit," pp. 63 *et seq.*; cf. Ps. xv.

wants, put ourselves in their place, and bear with them. It may be we have much to teach them, it may be they suffer from the want of discipline which we have neglected to give them, they interrupt and intrude upon our times of work; we think them petty, frivolous, and full of scruples; their long confessions seem to us unnecessary, and their questions unintelligent. It is just in these things that we have to purge and prune that they may bring forth more fruit, as those who watch for their souls, as those who must give account.[1]

Here are those who can develop the refinements of Christian life, and that fruit which only Christianity can produce. Here are those who can be a real help to the corporate life, supplying a very backbone of goodness, which can commend the Gospel message, and exhibit the beauty of the Christ-like life; who can show what is really meant by such fruit as love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance,[2] as real living and powerful energies.

The Christian life, after all, is the best evidence for Christianity. Dr. Milligan has shown us that, excellent as they may be, and convincing in their place, books of Christian evidence will never make men Christians: nothing will do this but the exhibition to those who are without the Church from them that are within, of the higher life which grace makes possible. We cannot afford to neglect the cultivation of our good people. Here they are entrusted to us, many of them old and invalided;

[1] Heb. xiii. 17. [2] Gal. v. 22.

men and women who have retired from life's activities, no longer Church workers, but Church characters. Here are those who have imprinted on them the scars of life's battle; they are those who have endured, on whose face may be traced the *arrière pensée* of sorrow. Those who with careful tending shall bring forth more fruit in their age, who have experience in suffering and self-victory; to whom God has given the power to plead. as we read of the Crucified and Risen Redeemer when about to enter on His life of pleading intercession: "And when He had so said, He showed unto them His hands and His side."[1]

Many of these old saints are like the wayside crucifix, living images of victory gained through suffering, who can teach and comfort and point the way to the true consecration of sorrow which so many encounter and so few know how to use.

Men and women like these ought to be some of the most cherished possession to him whose duty it is to watch for souls, and develop the seed which God has planted. We must be considerate for them, entertain a high estimate of them, work for and take care of them with thoughtful love. The sower may become rough, hard, and mechanical, but he must not neglect his Sixth Form. He must find time for them, cherish, develop, and help them; they are his treasures, the truly gentle, to be tendered by one who himself is gentle.

Another characteristic of the good soil is that it keeps what it has received. It is conservative.

[1] St. John xx. 20.

We may well believe that God especially desires us to be conservative with ourselves. We may have to pluck out the right eye and cut off the right foot, but it would be better for us to keep them if we can. A life which can use, and does not fear to use, all its powers is a great possession.

Moses has a use for his fiery temper as a leader of men; Cephas has the steadfastness of the rock in him in spite of lapses; St. John may use to a good purpose the fiery impetuosity of the Son of Thunder; Saul may find a scope for his burning zeal in methods legitimate, as well as in self-willed bigotry. The saint in whom all things are working together for good is, after all, a strength for good which must take its place before the restored penitent and the imperfectly formed character, however attractive it may be.

"Keeping" surely represents a great power of Christian development. It speaks of a character where each step towards perfection has grown out of that which preceded it, in a graduated scheme of excellence.

Holy Baptism has put into their right channels hereditary tendencies which, if left to themselves, apart from grace, would have developed into evil. Confirmation has seized the growing life, and has fastened it securely to the props and stays of grace, so that no hostile environment has power to injure. Absolution has healed the wounds of sin before it had formed a deadly habit. And Holy Communion supplies a steady means of growth in grace and Christian virtue. So life has gone on

in a peaceful and easy development, from grace to grace, without break or interval. It has been a time of steady growing instead of a time of constant trimming, uprooting, and replanting of feeble growth.

The sower must carefully consider with himself whether, in his methods, there is any danger of upsetting lives like these. He preaches new theories, he is a man who thinks and reads, he must show himself abreast of the times, he must correct the old worn-out fallacies of the past. And he thinks aloud, he advances his speculations crudely conceived and crudely expressed, and he pulls up what he believes to be seeds of error, and does not know that he is rooting up instead the good seed which has been steadily growing through a lifetime.

Even the truth has sometimes to be spoken with care, as people are able to bear it; but it is cruel to unsettle men's minds with hypotheses which grow up in a night and perish in a night. The damage done to the good far outweighs any possible advantage which may accrue to the waverer.

So it is with new methods and new cults. Like children, we are for ever pulling up the seed to see whether the plants have begun to grow. "I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil,"[1] said our Blessed Lord.

There is a great deal too much upsetting of old methods and substituting the new, which has

[1] St. Matt. v. 17.

tended to make the advent of "the new vicar" a time of apprehension and disturbance.

And so the fruit grows in patience.

How much impatience there is in life, and how much growth is hindered by it! There is impatience with life itself with those who cannot carry God's burden,[1] who, indeed, have lost the power of bearing,[2] until they throw the precious gift of life itself back in the face of God who gave it, in a hopeless suicide; thus plucking the fruit before it is ripe, and so dishonouring God's will concerning it.

Then there is impatience with the Church. God's methods are too slow for man's impetuosity. The same man must needs sow and reap and gather into barns, and he cannot accept it that he should labour and other men enter into his labours. And so there comes the constant seeking after change, new Creeds, new Prayer-books, new methods of evangelization. And men forget that God's work takes time, and that the seed in itself bears little resemblance to the fruit of which it is the promise.

And the sower himself becomes impatient with himself and his life's work. That which should be his joy becomes a drudgery, and that which should have been a patient continuance in well doing becomes a monotony of uncongenial taskwork.

There is need to watch carefully the growing activity of the Church, and, indeed, the missionary enterprise for which we are so thankful. It is one

[1] St. Matt. xi. 30. [2] Ecclus. ii. 14.

thing to offer to the heathen of our strongest and our best, it is another thing to seek to change the monotony of duty into the excitement of a crusade, and the enterprise of pioneer work.

Every man who meditates a sudden change in his work must be quite sure of his motives, and clear as to his call, for he must never forget that "vocation is a call to God, and not a call to work."

And we must not allow ourselves to become impatient with the formation of character. Cephas may break down, Boanerges may still be too impetuous, Onesimus may take a long time to reconcile his Christian brotherhood with his position.

It is the business of the sower to watch over the seed sown, and to wait and watch. "Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh."[1]

And yet there is room for a good discontent even in the patient fruit-bearer; there is an opening here, too, for ambition. A man may too easily settle down into the condition apparently of the elder son in the parable of the prodigal son: who rests content in not having been a prodigal, but has made no progress in love or in the refinements of the higher life. He rests satisfied with being

[1] St. James v. 7, 8.

planted in the good ground, but he does not bring his fruit to perfection.

Christianity is the religion that makes saints, not merely a system which eradicates thorns, or reduces prejudices, or softens surfaces.

The ideal of the Apostle is content with nothing short of the highest excellence. "My little children," he says, "of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you."[1]

And so, as he sows and works, the sower feels that if he is to be a teacher and developer of saints, he himself must be daily growing in grace, in gentleness of heart, in retentive faith, and in patient waiting for Christ, "as one that hath obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful."[2]

[1] Gal. iv. 19. [2] 1 Cor. vii. 25.

# CHAPTER IX

## THE ENEMY AND THE TARES

Invidiâ autem diaboli mors introivit in orbem terrarum. Imitantur autem illum, qui sunt ex parte illius.

In the prospect of failure which opens up before the preacher, he knows that he must face something more ; something worse even than the callous heart and shallowness, something worse than the unweeded soul, and defects in those who hear the Word. Our Blessed Lord tells us that we must be prepared for an active scheme of opposition. There is another pulpit occupied by a skilful *advocatus diaboli*, who will do his utmost to make void the message, to ruin the crop of convictions and plant the germs of death.

Our Blessed Lord has been careful to warn us of the malignant character of this sowing. It is cunning, skilful, unscrupulous, persistent, and very strong, and ready moreover to take advantage of any opportunity which is given to it.

It is something perhaps for which the preacher hardly makes sufficient allowance. "We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities,

against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."[1]

Let us take the case of one of our Confirmation candidates, on whom we are lavishing our instruction: what are our efforts to compare with the fierce and calculated attacks which are brought against him? Within and without, did we but know it, he is plied with almost unceasing temptation. Out of his heart, as from a granary, are produced the seeds of evil, the thoughts which germinate into action, the desires which clamour down reason, his very conscience is deflected and ceases to warn; his very acquirements, his education and training are turned against him; out of his business floats the deadly seed, out of his pleasure there is thrust up the flowery head of stifling sin. A weak ministry has very little chance against the organized forces of evil.

And the sower must never forget that Satan may only too easily get hold of him himself, and turn his message into a positive harm. Judas, besides being the possessor of great privileges, has also an unique opportunity of betraying Christ from his very nearness to Him. Let us all be prepared to find that a successful sowing needs a great deal more than the Sunday scattering of a set sermon, or the carefully planned message of a Bible-class with Scripture proofs garnished with the smattering of the latest scholarship. We shall need to watch, to follow up, to fight and to

[1] Eph. vi. 12.

protect, to be ready to support the feeble heart and faint faith, which are only too ready to give in.

## I

Our Blessed Lord in His parable especially warns us against tares, that is to say, a spurious wheat, which it is difficult to detect, while it occupies the ground, chokes vegetation and stops growth. We are aware, of course, of the old enemies to fruit-bearing which assume the more gigantic proportions as we attempt to cope with them. These are the evils which arise in the man's own heart, rising up in rank confusion, such as lust and greed which are deliberately sown by the powers of evil. There are the bad seeds which blow in upon the wind from the place in which the human life has to be lived, from the evil activities of the town and the stagnation of the country, and these are not left to chance, but are sown also deliberately by a legion of sowers. There are the evils which belong to the trade or profession which the man follows; what is known, for instance, in warehouse life as "living in" has its dangers, and "living out" has also its own peculiar temptation. Dulness is responsible for its own crop of evil, and gaiety has its own peculiar malignity as well. All these are comparatively easy to detect, even if they are hard to eradicate.

But there is something worse than this, there is the spurious wheat, the new religion which is sown

by what is called the spirit of the age, with its new systems, its new standards and new aspirations. There is culture, which promises so much and does so little, the so-called love of the beautiful which can so easily be twisted and turned to the vilest of purposes. "Art," says Dean Church, "and not only knowledge, has been in the poet's terrible phrase, 'procuress to the Lords of Hell.'"[1] Literature, art, music, can all be used, and are all too freely used at the present day by the religion of culture, to sow seeds which produce a deadly crop of tares, which, alas! are only too openly at variance with seed of true religion, even when they seem to be inextricably bound up with it.

It is easy, again, to sow in the uninstructed and indolent heart a substitute for religion, which does not offend by dogmatism, nor shock by the absence of all discipline. To impart the simple elements of morality may sound an excellent substitute for teaching the Church Catechism and the Apostles' Creed. And the evil crop grows before experience can be brought in to detect it. Archbishop Benson has been quoted as saying that St. Gregory of Nazianzus, when asked to what he attributed the great moral improvement of the times in which he lived, said, "to the consistent teaching of the doctrine of the Trinity."[2] The mere teaching of moral precepts is powerless to bring about what it sets itself to produce, and militates against one of the first principles of Christianity, which

[1] Dean Church, "Cathedral and University Sermons," p. 122.

[2] See Lyttelton, "Character and Religion," p. 149, *note*.

supplements the knowledge of what is good by the power to carry it out.

Moralists before now have compromised with some sins as irremediable. If it is a mere question of knowledge or expediency, the devil can easily manipulate into them deadly sin by an exercise of his craft.

This may be seen in the evils which are springing up around the question of Holy Matrimony.

It is in the interests of morality that we are urged to extend the scope of divorce. It is in the interests of morality that a man is to be allowed to marry his deceased wife's sister. It is in the interests of wise economy and prudence that married people are to be encouraged by illegitimate means to limit their family. Secret sin may be encouraged if it will prevent something worse; and generally a little evil may be countenanced to secure a greater good.

The whole principle of an improved, modified, or expurgated religion is false from the beginning, and can only produce tares.

Happy will it be for mankind if those who are commissioned to sow wheat are not led away to take their place among the sowers of tares. Let it only be considered, what are those things in religion which men are to be persuaded to treat as negligible? Holy Baptism, which deals with some of the difficulties of heredity, must be swept away into the denominational dust heap; Confirmation, which deals with some of the difficulties of environment, must share the same fate; Holy Communion,

which is calculated to arrest deterioration, must take its place with other optional practices of those who are disposed to follow them; Absolution, which deals with spiritual despair, can on no account be recognized; Holy Matrimony, which regulates and blesses the transmission of life, becomes a voidable State contract. The Ministry is robbed of all supernatural endowment, and access to the sick-bed is for the physician, and not for the priest.

So it is with the great truths of the Gospel, the so-called spirit of the age eviscerates and empties them of their meaning. The doctrine of the Atonement is contained, we are told, in the parable of the Prodigal Son, and nothing more is needed; while Sanctification is nothing more than a name given to the efforts of the soul to clear itself from the disabling contact of the flesh with which it is bound up.

We must never forget that the souls to whom we deliver our message are actively plied, many of them, with this *propaganda*. And to successfully produce tares is looked upon in many quarters as being quite as good as the more laborious process of rearing wheat.

## II

It will be well to look at the characteristics of the enemy we have to deal with, the rival sower we have to reckon with, as he is portrayed to us in the

titles by which he is known, in the pages of the Gospel.

Again and again there appears a subtle agent who is known by the title of the διαβόλος. And if it does not appear at first sight why such a limited title should be applied to an agent of such wide-spread malignity, a little reflection will show us how singularly appropriate such a designation is, and how comprehensive in its import. The secret slanderer is more dangerous than the open foe. And the quiet detractor is more potent for evil than the violent opponent. Sarcasm, insinuation, ridicule, and contempt are more to be feared by the advocates of a cause than the frank and reasoned opposition of avowed enemies.

The slanderer is busy in discounting all our statements, minimizing the benefits and magnifying the hardships of religion, while he distorts or stultifies its precepts. As of old, so now he slanders God to those who have given themselves up to obey His Law. "Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the Garden?"[1] "The whole question is extremely doubtful, and the best interpreters are against you." "God doth know,"[2] you are mistaken in your estimate of God as a God of love.

In the first place, what you believe is not true; and then further, the whole system of Church and Sacraments is an inhuman bondage, calculated only to fetter the freedom of nature and to stunt development. So with the Ministers of the Word,

[1] Gen. iii. 1. [2] Gen. iii. 5.

their whole position is attacked. A gentle insinuation here, a word of detraction there, a suggestion of a better course to be understood only by the best minds, will lead them too often to forget their privilege and their greatness, to turn from the supernatural to the secular, and to believe that they will best reach their people from the positions of "country gentlemen," and commend themselves as political agents rather than as servants of an absent King. Organization and social service become their first and main duties; prayer is a waste of time, and other-worldliness is a serious drawback to making the best of this world, where it is better to think about gaining its prizes than for ever to be engaged in seeking to save our own soul.

And so the slanderer seeks to sow the bitter fruit of his insinuation, so as to deprive us not only of the help of God, but also of the example and encouragement of our fellow-men. It is of little use seeking help in Christian fellowship when every one is more or less parading in a cloak of hypocrisy. "There is none good, no not one," is used as a weight to crush any nascent hope of the great possibilities of human nature. In vain do we sow seed, which is destined never to come up, or if it should come up, to wither away at once under the influence of an innate corruption. So he works on the minds of the young, telling them that sin is not only universal but inevitable. Everybody does the actions we are forbidden to perform, everybody reads the book which is said to be so

corrupting, everybody utters the opinion which we are told is soul-destroying. The really educated are against us, and men are not so good as they look, and so through loneliness and spiritual depression the weakly seed of the Word dies away, and a robust tare takes its place.

Further still, the slanderer slanders as to ourselves. Are we sure that our best actions have been done from the best motives? Is not the promising crop of seedlings a mere display which will blossom into pride? So he works on the soul until at last despondency does its deadly work. Offically "I am a failure." My sermons are useless, and are spoken in vain. What fruit have they brought forth, in church, or in the parish? Do I even practise what I preach? Morally the διαβόλος has sown my very soul with the suggestion of despair. "I cannot attain unto it." Nature is too strong for me, all my efforts are but the struggles of the captured animal, which plunge the victim further into the net. Happy is the man who wakes up in time to know and feel that gloom and depression are in themselves a sign that he is falling out of touch with God. Happy is the man who can take for his motto, with Bishop Hackett, "Serve God and be cheerful," who knows what a fruitful seedplot of evil is the discontented, despondent soul. "Fret not thyself, else shalt thou be moved to do evil."[1]

[1] Ps. xxxvii. 8.

## III

The battle with "the adversary" is a hard one, and moreover a necessary one. We must on no account "give place to the devil."[1] We are responsible in many cases for the neglected ground, for the ground that is receptive of evil, and which has not been predisposed to good. We have to make believers and develop penitents and to break up the fallow ground, and watch carefully against the adverse occupancy of evil.

The foe is a merciless one. Our Blessed Lord describes the evil agent as "a murderer from the beginning."[2] His whole mission is to kill. This is plain enough in those whom he withdraws from the warnings of God's Word, and persuades to evil and vicious causes. The poor drunkard is dragged down by his evil desire until the fibres of his life become diseased, his brain clouded, his spirit dimmed, and with a will dethroned he is dead while he lives, and staggers into the grave a very ghost of humanity. Lust in the same way is barbed with death; the alluring bait hides the hook. Art and literature dress it up, the devil's agents, whom he has bent to his wicked will, cause God's children to stumble, and plunge into a death more terrible than that of their victims; for the Bible is merciless to the procurer, and the agents of the White Slave traffic are bound by Satan in his most deadly grip. We can see the hand of the murderer again in the utter destruction of life and position which

[1] Eph. iv. 27. [2] St. John viii. 44.

overtakes dishonesty and all such kindred sins. But the sower is not always aware of the deadly nature of the intellectual and spirited attacks which are brought against his agencies. In time of plague, in barbarous countries, we know how the benevolent doctors, sisters and nurses, who go to minister to the poor victims of the disease, are met by those who will set the patients against them, and persuade them, if possible, that they are not physicians but poisoners. In like manner the sower of the good seed of God's Word cannot long be in ignorance of those who set those, for whose souls they wait, against their teaching as poisonous or at least unnecessary. Here, there is a man who is persuaded that all the precautions against sin, and all the preservatives of virtue which we have dictated to him, are unnecessary. As a miner he is to penetrate into the recesses of life to bring thence the hidden treasure, but he is persuaded to cast aside all the precautions against accident, and to discard as unnecessary the code of regulations which experience has collected as tending to success. In every other effort which the world makes for advancement or progress it is the expert who has to be consulted; all action is girt about with monitory clauses, and freedom is fettered by the minute precautions which are judged necessary to success. But in religion, where the issues are more important, the dangers more subtle, and mistakes more dangerous, men are persuaded into a condition of ease and indifference. They are dealing with a lenient God, a God indeed who is called

"Love" in the Holy Scriptures, but is never called "Indulgence." They are dealing with matters where the nature of the seed sown is indifferent, if so be that he who sows is in earnest. They are dealing in religion with a sort of by-work of life, not with the main end and object of it. And so death spreads, the death of good, and the growth of evil, fructifying more and more with rapid growth towards a fulness of development which once more is death. "For sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." [1]

Do not let us make a mistake. Tares are a very ugly crop, and very difficult to eradicate. *Obsta principiis.* It is quite true, God has told us, that we cannot hope to get rid of the evil crop, now and here; we must wait, and go patiently on, hoping still that good wheat will appear. Nothing is to be gained by pessimism, but rather much loss. But we shall have advanced some steps if we have measured in any way the certainty and the danger of the attack. It is a sad comment on human indolence, that our Blessed Lord, when He wished to drive home the need of true business-like methods in religion, should have found it necessary to point the careless just to the wisdom of one who was unjust, that they might transfer from the region of unscrupulous worldly wisdom something of the resource necessary for their own spiritual efforts.

Our enemy is very real, and very resourceful, and we must not hesitate to oppose art to art, and

[1] St. James i. 15.

strength to strength, while we remember that God only is omnipotent, and that the sowing of the tares is after all the result of human neglect, for the devil works in the heart only by our permission.

# CHAPTER X

## VIGILANCE

ἐν δὲ τῷ καθεύδειν τοὺς ἀνθρώπους.

In view of the vision, in view of the burden, in view of the word to be delivered, in view also of the great difficulties of the unreceptive soil and the unscrupulous energy of the enemy, it will be well for the minister of the Word to consider earnestly his need of diligence. It might be thought that at a time like this we might almost take diligence for granted. The world around us is moving at a great speed; the sermons as well as the services of the Church are multiplied; the breaks-down in the clerical ranks from sheer overwork are many. "We seem now to be on a tread-mill, where the most idle must keep step, or else be bruised by the revolving wheel of time."

### I

But there is one department of our life, one sphere of our activities where diligence is by no means a predominant characteristic, and that is the region of the spirit, where our message should be

received, assimilated and prepared for its transmission.

Personal holiness is after all the preacher's greatest endowment, and this is not bestowed upon us without an effort strong and persistent on our part. The gifts of God to the soul do not spring up as a sort of by-product of meetings, committees, clubs, recreation schemes, sport, scientific pursuits, or even intellectual study. Personal holiness, our first and greatest need, must be cultivated with care and diligence.

We cannot always command the soil; we are sure of the seed: cannot something be done to improve the sower?

For it is while men sleep that the evil seed is sown, and the indolence or spiritual sloth of the sower of the good seed is the opportunity of the enemy to scatter his tares.

There comes a time to many a man, especially in times of pressure of work, or even of worldly pursuits, when he is tempted to relax his hold upon God, and to be slack in his devotional life. "My soul truly waiteth still upon God,"[1] but not now. I cannot gather myself together to make my Meditation; I cannot find time even for my Office; I am on a holiday, or I am very busy in the parish, or I want the time for other purposes. And as a man who wishes to economize his expenditure will sometimes effect it out of his alms, so he will deduct the leisure which he requires out of the time set apart for God.

[1] Ps. lxii. 1.

Short of this, is not God's minister tempted to regard the religious exercises and the religious times set apart in his life, as something analogous to the religious hour in a Government school, which at the best may be regarded as a sort of παρέργον or extra subject?

Further, there are some who feel that time spent in devotion, as Prayer and Meditation, or the Divine Office, is so much time subtracted from the real activities of life, and to all intents and purposes a species of religious selfishness, as if Prayer were a sort of hobby which might well be ridden too far. But it is necessary here to recall ourselves to first principles. Our Lord's own words come back to us, so profound in their significance, so fathomless in their depth. "For their sakes I sanctify Myself."[1]

Time which is spent on prayer is the highest kind of self-improvement. And self-improvement is the truest kindness to the people to whom God's agent is called to minister.

The priest of God is *ex hypothesi*, the spiritual man in the place where he is called to minister. His activity and information are concerned with spiritual things, just as the work of the different professional men, the doctor, the lawyer, and the like, first and mainly concerns that department of skill in which they habitually practise.

And as the clients of the different professional men expect a complete, accurate, and constantly freshened aptitude in their several departments, so

[1] St. John xvii. 19.

the priest of God is expected to be stored with fresh and vigorous spiritual energy, to be exercised for the good of those to whom he ministers. To be cold, lifeless and unspiritual is not merely to injure himself, it is to deprive those to whom he ministers of that to which they have a reasonable claim, as from one who is set over them in the Lord.

The time spent in perfecting the instrument for its work may be time which cannot be relied upon to make any display among the competitive activities of modern life; but for all that, it carries with it, more than men think, the spiritual efficacy of a work which cannot be measured by human standards. "Tell him I am engaged with the Master," was the reply which Mr. Spurgeon sent to an importunate Deacon who had announced that a servant of God wished to speak with him.

For what is the *rationale* of the priesthood, as exercised by one put in trust with the Gospel? It surely is this, that God bestows grace, through human agents, upon His people. The old taunt accused the priest of standing between God and man. In a sense this is true; but the priests stand between not to intercept but to transmit, to take the miraculous bread out of the multiplying hand first given to them, and then to give it to the multitude.

If this be true, we do well to consider what it means. No human agency can vitiate the Sacraments. Thank God for that. But human nature being what it is, the personal element in the human

agent must always be a potent factor for good or evil. So St. Paul, having in view the devotion of those who minister the Gospel, says, "We beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves."[1] So the writer of the Book of Samuel points out the malignity of moral evil as displayed by God's accredited servants, when he says of Hophni and Phinehas, how in consequence of their ungodly ways, "men abhorred the offering of the Lord."[2]

While the prophet summarizes the need which especially attaches to ministers in holy things, when he says, "Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord."[3] How important it is that all should be sanctified in him who preaches the Word, interprets the Scriptures, absolves, offers the Holy Sacrifice, and deals with the souls of men! All things conspire to show that the minister of the Word should look upon personal holiness as a thing to be scientifically pursued, and with the utmost diligence, and as earnestly as we pursue any work for the Church which we consider at once to be necessary or even helpful.

[1] 1 Thess. v. 12, 13. [2] 1 Sam. ii. 17.
[3] Isa. lii. 11.

## II

Personally, all who minister for God should have learned to estimate themselves humbly, and with a due sense of their own unworthiness. It is a sorry thing to provide a lamp so heavy and magnificent that it prevents the light from shining through with its full brilliancy. Yet God's minister must learn at the same time to realize his own importance in the economy of God. "Every life that is lived has its message to the world;" this in itself is true; but there is a greater truth which must also be realized, especially by those who do ministerial work. "I am here to help God." [1] And if we have so far realized the importance of this truth, then another truth will dawn upon us, which is this, that I can help God best by being myself. It is a great thing to realize self, to realize the place of self in God's machinery, and further to realize the importance of making this self efficient in the best way, so that in the words of St. James, we may be "perfect and entire, wanting nothing." [2]

This is obviously of the first importance in one who is called upon to do God's work. The greater the work the heavier the pressure, the swifter the speed the more important it is that the individual parts which go to make up the complexity of the world's machine should be sound.

It is an awful thing to see a man who has gone wrong in the terrible and dangerous subversion of

[1] See Dr. Robinson, "Co-operation with God."

[2] St. James i. 4 : *τέλειοι καὶ ὁλόκληροι, ἐν μηδενὶ λειπόμενοι.*

powers, meant to be for life, but now only potent for death. Man more than any other living thing can be depraved in every region of depravity. He is like an engine which has left the line on which it was destined to travel, which can only now plough its way in widespread devastation, and destroy the very things which were designed to minister to its completeness.

But, on the other hand, it is a splendid thing to see a man who has gone right, where the ministering senses serve in subordinate usefulness, where the counselling reason gives advice which will be followed, and the spirit is in touch with God, and the sovereign will give orders which are obeyed.

Once in the history of the world this has been seen in its perfection. He, the Son of man, the ideal Man, exhibited a wonderful humanity in its perfect form. To see Him was to be attracted: men came running to Him.[1] To hear Him was to be fascinated with a wonderful enchantment: "Never man spake like this Man."[2] To have secured His presence was to be safe from evil. "Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died."[3]

What powers are his who is God's minister! And yet it may be he is seeking for money to give him a greater self-sufficiency, or for a position which can be bestowed by a patron, in order that he may have a higher platform on which to work. Or he is seeking the honour and support which come from

[1] St. Mark ix. 15. [2] St. John vii. 46.
[3] St. John xi. 21.

man only. Whereas if he was but himself, if his whole being were working harmoniously in union with God, and to His glory, he would need nothing else. Men would take knowledge of him, too, that he had been with Jesus,[1] and he would exercise a power which no money, patronage, or human support could supply.

Why is it, then, that there are so many failures? Why does the earthly body force down the soul, and the personal element, which is unworthy, strangle the official which has been engaged for the direct service of God?

Largely, it must be said, for want of diligence, or of the higher ambition. Instead of aiming at perfection, the servant of God is content to take his place with the average man, and so does the work of God deceitfully.

He does not realize that God has put him where he is, because he is the right man for the particular post at that time, even if his mission be a mission of apparent or temporary failure. He is there to hold the fort, to fight the battle, it may be only to tide over an interval in the life of the parish or community; but he spoils God's plans by an initiative of his own, working out, or attempting to work out, a plan of which he does not even know the outline, much less the details. And so he ceases to be the man which he might be.

The rich young ruler was vouchsafed a glimpse of what he might be, and do for God; but he had other visions for himself, and other plans, and so

[1] Acts iv. 13.

he failed. Simon saw in a distant future a vision of an ideal to which his character might reach, but it was with pain and grief and effort that Simon merged into Cephas. If we look back at the old prophecies which went before on us,[1] how little we are realizing them. Old ideals are fading, old visions are becoming dim. As grace passes through us, and virtue goes out of us, as our lips keep knowledge,[2] and our tongue speaks of God's mercy and judgment, why do we retain so little for ourselves of that grace whose efficacy we have tried and known?

"Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?"[3] *Respice, aspice, prospice.* The three searching words are still powerful to rouse the sleeping soul. Self-culture is fundamental in God's minister. And it is this which is important, rather than the choice of work. If the instrument is ready, God may be trusted to know how best to utilize it. And then if the call be to the distasteful work of Jonah, or the sad mission of Isaiah, or the unlooked-for task set to St. Philip, or the arduous commission vouchsafed to St. Paul—at least we shall be ready.

## III

But without doubt this pursuit of personal holiness, which is fundamental, which lies at the root of all successful preaching, needs diligence.

[1] 1 Tim. i. 18. [2] Mal. ii. 7.
[3] Acts ix. 6.

There must be no sleeping here while the enemy is busy sowing his tares.

It is a pursuit which will need an expenditure of time. We are living in an age when men grudgingly count up the minutes allotted to devotion.

But it is well to remember that in the religious service which God required from the Israelites, time formed a very serious item. The time allotted to their religious exercises must have been considerable: and further, the religious obligation imposed upon the strict Jew necessitated that three times in a year he should break up the routine of his home life, whatever he might be doing, and repair to Jerusalem to keep the feasts.

Further, if we examine the perfect life as exhibited in our Blessed Lord, we see the same thing. Not only do we have the strange proportion of time in which the hidden life at Nazareth stood to the active life of the Ministry: but also in the Ministry itself, brief as it was, no exemption was claimed for the Lord of Jewish religion. He attended the feasts; He submitted to Jewish ordinances and rites. He would spend whole nights in prayer to God.

And if we look to our own ordered life of devotion, there is little doubt as to what it ought to be. We are placed, when we are admitted into the Church, into a carefully graduated life of devotion, along which we are ordered to proceed by easy stages from grace to grace, up the Sacramental ladder, while the measure of our prayer is that we

should pray without ceasing.[1] It may very easily be the case that we ought to devote more of our day to prayer than we do. It is recorded of Bishop Andrewes that he would spend five hours a day in prayer.[2]

It may be that diligence has something to say to us here. The day is shortened by late sowing, hurried by want of method, and broken because the devotional life is not safe-guarded and honoured as it ought to be.

The "droning cathedrals," "the lazy monks," may have more to tell us than we sometimes know or care to know. It may be that where short services and active work have much to show, we should be able to show more if we studied the effect of longer services and less activity.

"You can hurry man," said Bishop Milman, "but you cannot hurry God."

"Once more let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing."[3]

If the pursuit of personal holiness needs time, equally it needs trouble. Goodness is no easy matter. διὸ καὶ ἔργον ἐστὶ σπουδαῖον εἶναι,[4] said Aristotle. Virtue is difficult, and sin is extremely powerful. Our soul, as we have already seen, is like a garden that needs constant work and watchfulness. The weeds grow apace if they are not

[1] 1 Thess. v. 17.

[2] See quotation in "The Personal Life of the Clergy," Dr. Robinson, p. 6.

[3] St. James i. 4.

[4] Arist. "Et: Nic:" ii. 9. 2.

frequently watched; the watering in the days of heat and the protection in the days of cold, both need an expenditure of watchful care. There are blight and insects which make short work of all human effort, if they are not provided against.[1]

We shall find in our vocabulary some ugly words such as "sin," "fault," "wickedness," and the like, which bear testimony to the damage which may very easily be effected in the garden of the human soul.

There are many who remember the hopeful Lenten sowing, and the genial warmth of the Easter sun, who are now lamenting the inadequate show for all their labour. There has been little watering, the weeds have been allowed to grow, and the predatory insects have not been driven away. Alas! for him who has been "put in trust with the Gospel,"[2] if at the last he can but say with sorrowful regret, Alas! I have done the work of God deceitfully.[3]

[1] It was noticed a short time ago in the newspapers, that almost a fabulous sum per week was given to each labourer in a market garden to get rid of the red spider.

[2] 1 Thess. ii. 4. [3] Jer. xlviii. 10.

THE END

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